A History of Merrick County

From "the beginning" to 1995.

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History of Merrick County,

NEBRASKA.

From "the beginning" to the year 1895.

BY C. E PERSINGER,
Editor of The Nonpareil at the time this History was published therein.

ILLUSTRATED.

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PREFACE.

In the succeeding pages will be found "A History of Merrick County, from 'the beginning' to 1895," as it appeared during the months of March to August, inclusive, in the columns of The Nonpareil, Central City, Nebraska. As an excuse for the existence of this work, I will only say that the events related therein seemed to me worthy a more permanent and convenient record than any they have heretofore found. In explanation of evident lack of style and occasional minor errors, I may state that the history has been written in the midst of a most exacting business life—a statement which I am sure will be understood by all who have ever had occasion to attempt a like task under like conditions.

In conclusion I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Messrs. Fitch Bros. for the use of the Courier files, and to numerous "old settlers" for their assistance, and to express the hope that the record as hereinafter made is not altogether unworthy the subject which it attempts to treat.

C. E. PERSINGER.

CHAPTER I.

"IN THE BEGINNING."

THE early history of Merrick County (which was in its earliest years identical with that of Central City) seems to center about an old cottonwood tree which, in those "desert days," stood a lonesome but welcome sight on the north bank of the Platte river. Legend—such as so young a country as ours dares aspire to—hints to us that the old "Lone Tree" was the place of assembly for the red man in the days of his undisputed possession. Beneath the shadow of the old cottonwood the chief is said to have summoned his braves for consultation concerning a proposed hunt for the then plentiful bison. Or perhaps some thoughtless traveler on his way east or west had come into the red man's domain alone and without protection. Then the "Lone Tree" heard the guttural tones of the council of war, and in its solitude saw the red man creep silently nearer the unfortunate traveler and with his blood-curdling yell flash suddenly upon him and bury the tomahawk in his brain. Then followed the old tree's unwilling listening to the deeds of blood boasted of by the braves gathered beneath its boughs. Only in old age did its branches shelter peaceful pursuits and mark a resting place of the westward-moving van of civilization and settlement.

Such is the character which legend, born doubtless in the vivid imagination of some undeveloped novelist, but supported in no small degree by the facts of early history, gives to the veteran cottonwood from which our town took its first and best-known name. But passing by unauthenticated legend, the old "Lone Tree" loses little of either importance or interest as we approach the days of earliest settlement. This solitary guardian of the Platte was situated about fifty rods westward from the southeast corner of the farm now occupied by Eugene Hilton. For many years it was one of the famous landmarks on the long and weary journey to the great west of unknown extent and

amazing possibilities. But few of those who had learned to love the old cottonwood could forbear carrying away a branch or piece of bark as a memento, or at least carving a name or sign upon its rough surface, and overcome at length by the weight of its friends' remembrances, and its end hastened by old age and the many fires kindled at its foot, the old "Lone Tree" fell a victim to the fury of the great storm of 1865. Pieces of its scarred body have gone from one end of the land to the other as mementoes of the long journey from east to west across the plains. For a year after its overthrow a large slab of the tree was to be seen on the platform of the newly-erected "depot" at Central City, but it, too, failed to withstand long the attack of the curiosity seeker, and disappeared entirely. Mr. Hilton informs us that the trunk and lower branches of the old tree were during its later years entirely covered with names to the height of thirty feet. Unfortunately for the interest of our history, no one ever secured a photograph or drawing of the "Lone Tree," and we are forced to content ourselves with an illustration of the spot where this veteran giant of the forest once raised his head toward the sky and cheered the lonely traveler for forty miles of his journey. Perhaps, however, the mere location of this historic character may fix a little more firmly upon the minds of our younger readers the knowledge of the object around which centers the affection of all those who helped to lay the foundation of our county's history.*

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*Under date of Jan. 31, 1898, Mr. Brewer writes us as follows:

The first time I saw the old Lone Tree was on the 20th day of September, 1860. It was then a green and vigorous tree. The next time I saw it was in 1863. It was then dead and leafless. The repeated fires of the pilgrims about its roots had done the work. It stood there, gaunt and blighted, an emblem of death and desolation, for two years. It went down in the great storm of 1865. In its prime it was a glorious tree—a typical cottonwood, between three and four feet in diameter at stump height, and twenty feet to the first limb. The branches were widespreading and the whole tree was remarkably symmetrical in its proportions. It was visible for twenty miles up or down the river. Seen from these points it appeared to stand a long distance from any other tree, but really it was only about eighty rods to other timber above on the bank of the Platte. It was a noted landmark in the old days of overland travel and was known in every town and hamlet from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

"Preceding the Union Pacific Railroad by several years," says one account, "was the Western Stage Company, to which repeated reference is made in the whole history of the Platte river region." This road followed closely the course of the Platte, running through Merrick

The cross (X) on the right indicates, approximately, the location of the old "Lone Tree." The bush beneath the cross on left of picture rises from the ruins of the old "Lone Tree Ranch." The picture was taken from road along river bank, looking east toward bend in river where it swings a little south, leaving a long stretch of wooded lowlands.

County, in fact, so close to the edge of the bank that frequent changes were necessitated by sections of the road being undermined and washed away. An interesting relic of the early days is the surveyor's establish-

ment of the old stage road,* in which he describes it as lying so many feet "south of Hartwell's barn," a straw structure of a few years permanency! Such seems to have been the lack of appreciation which our fathers had of the "lastingness" of the work upon which they were entering. The idea that the place of their settlement should one day be one of the most prosperous and fertile of all this broad land seems to have occurred to but few of the pioneers, and many of their early words and acts were marked by the same seeming lack of comprehension of the work upon which they had entered and the results for which it should in later years be responsible. Wells Brewer, writing for the Courier in 1874, says of the country which now composes Merrick County:

> Indeed, it was generally admitted, in those days, that this would never be much of a farming country, not altogether because the climate was such that farm products could not be successfully grown, but because that, beyond supplying the limited demand caused by the overland travel, there was no market and would not be one for a generation to come. Stock raising, it was thought, was the only use

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*Another road, the old "Mormon trail," ran through the northern part of Merrick County and southern part of Nance County. A journey over it by a party of which the Brewer brothers were members is thus described by Mr. Wells Brewer in the Lone Tree Courier of June 25, 1874:

> Late in the afternoon of the 20th of May, 1859, a couple of pilgrim wagons, slowly wending their way along the old Mormon trail on the south bank of the Loup, crossed the boundary line and entered the limits of Merrick County.....The old trail they were following was none of the plainest. Having been travelled but little for the past four years it was in some places beginning to be overgrown with grass. About five oclock it appeared to leave the river and strike directly for the bluffs, and without doubt there was neither tree nor shrub nor living water for miles. Under such circumstances it was plainly folly to leave the friendly river at this late hour. There was no timber growing along this, the south side of the river, but the driftwood along its banks afforded an abundance of fuel. It was accordingly resolved to go into camp for the night.....The morning that followed was bright, cool and pleasant. The road had bidden a final farewell to the Loup, striking directly for the bluffs.....To each one of the company the country they were now entering was, in truth, an unknown land. None of them ever had the slightest idea of making it a home.....That this country would ever be settled and improved, and the prairie converted into farms, was to them conceivable only as the remote possibility of a distant future. For a short distance the road wound along at the base of the bluffs, as if in dread of entering,....but at last nerved itself for the effort and boldly entered the bluffs, climbing at the outset a steep, sandy hill. But when once fairly among the bluffs the road was tolerably good, following narrow winding valleys and occasionally crossing sandy ridges that to all appearances were entirely destitute of vegetation.

this vast treeless, mineless region could ever be successfully put to. A dense population was never thought possible; only a stock ranch every eight or ten miles, with a thousand or two head of cattle, was all any of us old settlers ever expected to see.

Referring to the "History of Nebraska" again, we find that "In 1858 the company established a station at Lone Tree, and erected the first building in the county. It was a small, uncouth affair, composed of unscaled cottonwood logs and sod roof,* and has long since disappeared. At this early day weekly trips across the plains were made with four-horse coaches, 'Lone Tree Station' being one of the twenty-mile stopping places." The stage coach trips through Merrick County were uneventful ones, as neither Indians nor robbers paid much attention to the route west of Columbus.†

The "Lone Tree" and the stage line constitute about all of the history of Merrick County previous to the coming of our first settlers, which will be discussed in our next chapter.

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*Mr. Hilton informs us that the building had a shingle roof.

†Although not strictly Merrick County history, we may find the description of the "mail car," which carried the mail across the Platte to Kearney, worth reading. On account of the deep water a wagon with wheels 6 and 8 feet in diameter, with tires six inches broad, with the box perched high in air, was necessary, and even this "stilted" affair was often flooded in times of high water.

CHAPTER II.

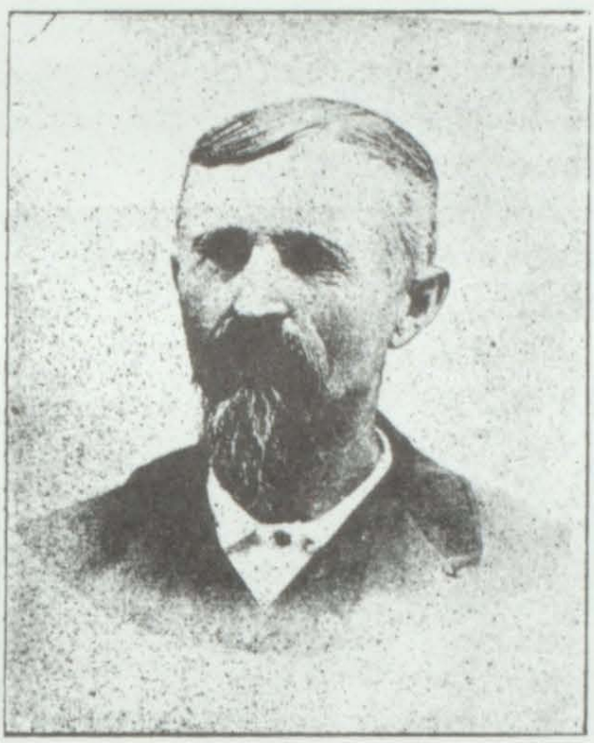
THE EARLY SETTLERS.

FROM 1858 until 1869—eleven years—the early settlers had no permanent "town." Lone Tree Station served simply as a "depot" for the designation of a settlement which was scattered along over considerable territory adjacent to the Platte River. During these eleven years Merrick County was passing through the uncertain first stages of early settlement. To the question, "Who was the first settler on Merrick County soil?" we doubt if one-fourth of the present population could give a definite answer. Yet, so far as we can determine by both the records and the memories of the old settlers, he who first made his home on the soil of the newly named county is still one of our leading business men, just as interested in the county and its future now as he was in the days of his first acquaintance with it.

From the July 4th, 1876, address of John L. Martin, on the occasion of the "Centennial Celebration," we glean the following account of the coming of the first settler:

> In August, 1859, James Vieregg, returning to the States from the gold fields of California, stopped in Hall County to visit with his brother John, who had "squatted" there. While resting there and beholding the fertile plains displayed before him, and looking with prophetic eye forward to its future greatness, he came down within the boundary of Merrick County, drove a cottonwood stake into the ground and lariatted his claim on what the government surveyors afterwards located as the southeast quarter of section 5, township 11 north, range 8 west. This claim was located Thursday, September 5th, 1859, and was the first settlement by a white man in Merrick County, Nebraska.

The Merrick County to which Mr. Vieregg came is well described by Wells Brewer, in answer to the question, "What was Merrick County then?"



JAMES VIEREGG,

MERRICK COUNTY'S EARLIEST SETTLER.

From a comparatively recent photograph.

Many roving trappers and hunters had passed through it, sojourning for a few weeks and perhaps months, but previous to the summer of 1859 no white man had called it his home. It had long been the battle ground between the Pawnees and the tribes of the Plains, the Sioux, the Cheyennes and the Arapahoes. ....For a thousand years at least it had been a part of the favorite grazing ground of the buffalo, the elk and the antelope, as the numerous bones, heads and horns at all depths in the soil abundantly testify. For countless ages the prairie grass had started up fresh and green with each returning summer's sun, to be swept away by the prairie fires that followed the first frosts of each succeeding autumn; ....and the wild prairie flowers had bloomed on the banks of this broad river, had nodded in the wind, and had "wasted their sweetness on the desert air."

It is difficult for us to conceive of the days when Columbus on the east and Grand Island on the west were the nearest towns, and when the scantiness of these often prolonged the eastward journey to Omaha and the westward one to "Fort Kearney." To Omaha was a trip of ten days with the "freight" and one of two days by the "passenger" coach. To Kearney was a journey of four days with oxen and of one day with horses.*

THE FIRST HOMESTEAD,

Taken up in 1859 by Mr. Vieregg. The house seen in the picture was not built until 1865-6, just after the former house had been destroyed by fire.

But Mr. Vieregg's honor as the first Merrick Countyite is not without a close competition. It was the latter part of the same day, toward sunset, that two other travelers, from the east this time, stopped beneath the lengthened shadow of the old "lone tree," and counseled whether it would be a good neighborhood in which to make a new business venture. Deciding in the affirmative,

*Mr Vieregg says no more was thought of a journey to Denver in those early days than people now seem to think of a trip from Palmer to Central City.

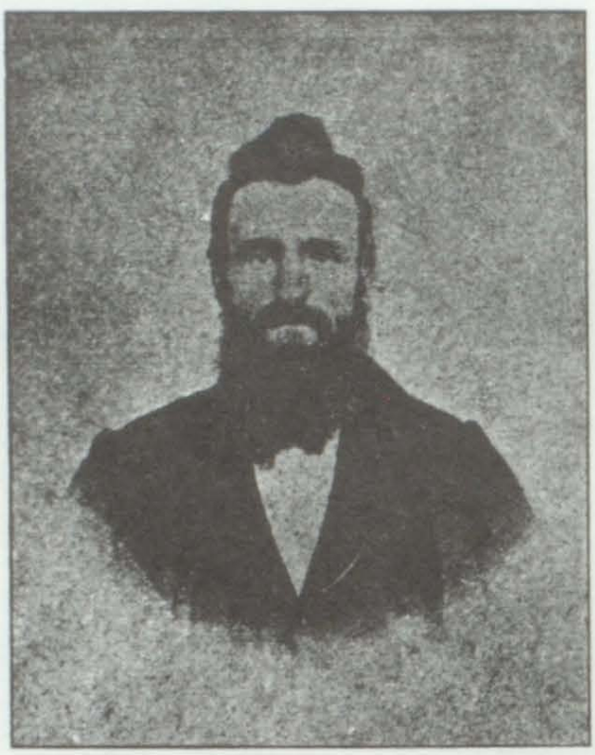
they set about the establishment of that complex combination of all branches of industry known then as a "ranch." It may be allowable here to remark that a "ranch" in those days included everything from a hotel, with its inevitable bar, to the feeding of stock for markets further east or west. These two travelers who are entitled to the honors as second and third inhabitants of Merrick County were Jesse Shoemaker and Chas Eggerton, both of Douglas County. By the end of six months Mr. Shoemaker had his family located with him in his new home. "Shoemaker's Point," as the situatton of the ranch was named

J. G. BREWER

From a photograph taken in 1865.

by the people of its day, was only a short distance from the present town of Chapman, and was the site of the first post office in Merrick County, located there in 1861, with W. H. Mitchell as postmaster. "Previous to its establishment," says Wells Brewer in a letter to the Lone Tree Courier of August 20th, 1874, "the settlers in the middle and eastern portion of the county had generally had their mail directed

to Columbus, whence it was forwarded to them by the kindness of the postmaster, through the pockets of the stage drivers. This insecure method of conveyance was sometimes painfully apparent in the condition of the letters when they reached their destination, especially if the weather happened to be stormy. Again, as there was a change of drivers at Eagle Island (situated at the extreme eastern limit of Merrick County, in the Platte River) it sometimes happened that the driver from Columbus failed to deliver to his successor the letters in charge, in which case they would be carried back to Columbus. When there



WELLS BREWER

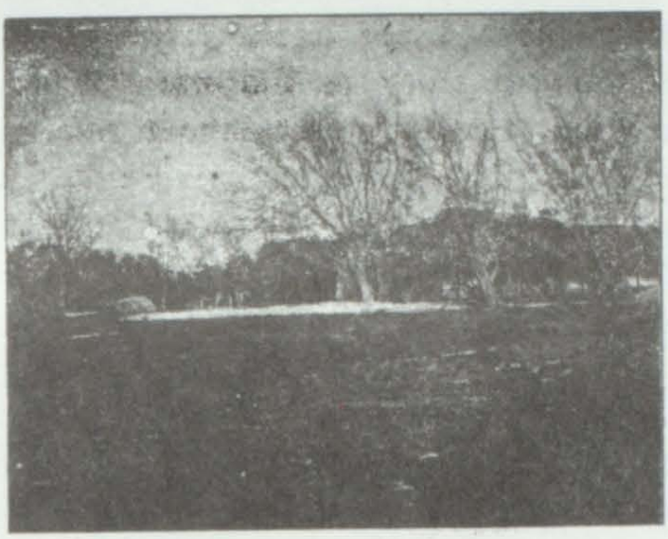
From a photograph taken in 1865.

was only a weekly line of stages, the delay thus occasioned was considerable." But the further history of our early "post office" will be taken up in a later part of this chapter. For the present we will resume our work of becoming acquainted with the early settlers.

It was only a little later in the same year that J. G. and Wells Brewer, returning from their "Pikes Peak" search for gold, arrived in

Merrick County in quest of a new home. Their coming is thus described by the latter:

For many days and weeks our pilgrims had been journeying over the verdureless waste of the great plain, wearied with its death-like monotony. As may readily be supposed, the wide, green valley of the Platte had to them unusual charms. The little patches of sod corn by the roadside that they occasionally passed looked so green and luxuriant, the little earth-covered cabins of the settlers, few and far between though they were, looked so cozy and comfortable to them, who had passed so many months without seeing any human habitation whatever, that they were more and more persuaded that the land in which they were journey-



HOMESTEAD OF J. G. BREWER.

ing was a goodly land, and that the parched, dreary, and irreclaimable desert was passed. So entirely were they convinced of this that at night, when they halted at the earth-covered cabin of one of the settlers it required but little setting forth on the part of said settler of the good qualities of the soil and climate to induce them to make up their minds to halt for a season, at least, and look around. With that halt of our pilgrims to look around the die was cast; they never continued their journey.

Judge Brewer at once located on the farm which yet bears his name, but after a brief stay his brother Wells returned temporarily to Michigan. The names of Messrs. Vieregg and Brewer, thus early associated with the history of our county, have been prominent in all its later development, as will be found in subsequent chapters. To

Mr. Wells Brewer, especially, we are indebted for the larger portion of the facts concerning our early history.

But for the present we shall leave them to the mercy of the yet uncivilized Indians, while we follow the movements of the first family which made Merrick County its permanent home. On January 1st, 1860, Jason Parker drove the stakes which bounded his newly acquired possessions, and in March brought his family out to share the fortunes of the great west. Mr. Parker's original claim lies just west up the river from the farm now occupied by Mr. Frank Parker, Sr., a son of Jason Parker.

For the history immediately following Mr. Parker' s introduction into Merrick County life we are again indebted to the "History of Nebraska," which tells the story as follows: "The next accession to the county's population, but not a permanent one, was occasioned by the erection of an imposing structure on Eagle Island by one Bill Hufftalen. It was built of hewn logs and roofed with actual shingles! The ambition of its owner, however, seems to have leaped his pocket-book (or something), for the ranch building had scarcely been finished when it was purchased by the Western Stage Company. Major Hartwell afterward came into possession of it. The 'Lone Tree Ranch' changed hands several times in the course of the year, and another establishment was in complete operation at Warm Slough. Half a mile west of Lone Tree, Lew Hill operated a ranch a short time. He was a stage driver by occupation, a road agent of the stage company, and, on account of some irregularity, he 'got notice to quit.' It was just above this claim that J. G. Brewer had erected his cabin. The next settler after Mr. Brewer whose personal record is a part of the county's history, is John L. Martin, who had during 1860 been living at Shell Creek. In May, in 1861, he settled upon a claim about a mile and a half southeast of Chapman, where he remained until the time of his death in 1893." During the whole of his lifetime Mr. Martin was a conspicuous figure in the political history of the country. His wife was no less prominent, although in another way, being for five years the only physician between Columbus and "Fort Kearney,"

James Huteson, who had put in the winter of 1860 61 on Parker's Island, in the spring of 1861 moved north to the place now his home

and started a ranch. In the same year Mrs. Mary Hilton came to Merrick County and took possession of the stage house. Soon afterward the family built a ranch house across the road from the Lone Tree, and still later moved up the river. Their final settlement was made on the southern portion of the land now occupied by Mr. Eugene Hilton, With the few other immigrants who have escaped the recorder's pen, the number of Merrick County's inhabitants at the close of the year 1861 was less than forty. In 1863 Wells Brewer returned from Michigan and settled in the county, and with Richard Eatough,* who in the

HOMESTEAD OF WELLS BREWER.

same year settled near the present situation (on this side of the river, however) of his son James, completed the list of early settlers so far as we shall attempt to enumerate them in the present chapter.

The stretch of country which is now included in Merrick County was never the scene of as tragic occurrences as were the counties on

*At the time of his death (1877) the Courier commented as follows upon the surroundings of Mr. Eatough's early life.

He was one of the oldest settlers in the state. Where now stands Central City he a few years ago mowed hay for his stock.....He saw the whole growth of this village. When he came the Union Pacific railroad had not been commenced. There was no village—not a single store. Hay was mown at pleasure in any part of the ground now occupied by Central City.

the west; yet Merrick County was not without its stirring, and sometimes really dangerous, incidents of frontier life. We have at hand two or three examples of what the early settlers were called upon to pass through. The first is contained in the record of daily occurrences as recorded in the diary of J. L. Martin, and reads as follows:

May 29.—Sioux (300) here; stole muslin.
June 5.—Indians here. Bartley stabbed.
June 6.—Indians drove away cattle.
June 9.—Military company camped here.
June 21.—500 Indians here; tried to stab me.
June 23.—Report 1000 Indians coming down valley.
June 24.—Went to Jim's [James Vieregg's] and stayed all night.
June 26.—Started for home for assistance.

Mr. Henry Martin informs us of the particulars relating to the entry of June 21st. Henry and his father were breaking with a "double header" composed of two oxen and two horses. While Henry was occupied in fixing the chain by which the horses, who preceeded the oxen, were attached to the plow, several Indians came up and demanded one of Mr. Martin's oxen. Mr. Martin refused and started around his plow, when an Indian attempted to stab him, and only failed because Mr. Martin jumped backward. Henry at this juncture threw the monkey wrench, with which he was working, at the Indian and knocked him down. Then Mr. Martin jumped on to one of the horses and ran for the barn, Henry following on one of the oxen. They ran the stock into the stable and then made for the house, where they frightened the Indians away by running around in the house and shoving their three rifles through the various loop holes, thus leading the Indians to believe there were several in the house. The Indians, however, took with them a considerable of the family wardrobe which had that morning been washed and hung out to dry.

The others occurred a little later in the same year, and are thus described in a recent letter from Mrs. J. G. Brewer, now of La Porte, Texas:

I have been alone with over a thousand Indians and received no harm; then again a few have conducted themselves in such a manner as to frighten a hundred brave women. In one instance, I had brought about $5 worth of dry goods of a

peddler and laid them on a bed. The Indians were camping on the Island, and some of them came into the front room of our house while I was in the kitchen. I could not get them out of the house for a long time, and then the goods were gone. In the evening the hired man and myself went to their camp, and they ordered us to go away. The hired man went as fast as he could to the house, leaving me alone. I told the Indians I must have my goods before I left the tepee, for I knew they had them. They set up a great howl and threatened me in every way—by stripping off their blankets, pulling out their knives, and getting their bows and arrows ready. I think I was too frightened to move; at least I did not,

JOHN L. MARTIN.

until they took me by the arms and put me out of their wigwam.

Then I went home alone, as Mr. Brewer was gone. These statements may appear trifling to those who read this history, but let them be placed under the same circumstances and they would find it no laughing matter.

There was a Mr. Hill living half a mile from us, and one day as I was looking down the road (being alone so much I got in the habit of watching) I saw there were Indians around his house I was perfectly satisfied that I would recieve a call. After a little I saw Viola Parker (now Mrs. John Kyes) running toward me, screaming. She said they were using Mrs. Hill horribly. Not a man was to be found. Mr. Brewer was in Omaha, the hired man was hunting for a lost cow. We decided we could do her no good, and so ran as fast as we could up the road, our hair streaming in the wind and making us appear very much like squaws.

After going about three miles we met our hired man. We were nearer dead than alive. He assured us that he would protect us, and after resting a little while we started for home. When we arrived, Mrs. Hill was there, wailing and crying, her clothing nearly torn from her body and great locks of hair pulled from her head. On our way back we had met the Indians, and dangling at their sides were bed quilts, pans, pails, cheese boxes that were used for tomato and cabbage plants. and various other things from our houses.

Soon after a party of them came to our place and commenced taking things from the walls and stealing things generally after we had fed them well. But Mr. Brewer ran foul of them and made them throw off their blankets, and tried to kick the worst one out of doors. The Indian thereupon drew a small gun from some concealed place and pointed it at Mr. Brewer. Charley Hartley (the hired man) saw the performance (Mr. Brewer did not) and jumped at the Indian, knocking

JOHN L. MARTIN'S OLD HOME

the gun from his hand. The contents of the gun lodged in the wall about 2 inches from Hartley's head. Hartley was very indignant, and so were the Indians, as was plainly shown by their constant "worrying" of us, and returning for revenge, however petty. It was terrible, not knowing how soon we might be scalped. Our windows and doors were always left unbolted, as it seemed the safest way. To be sure we had the consolation that there were large "trains" camping near us, with a goodly number of men armed to the teeth, and the stage company also ran their coaches twice a day and were a good deal of company, serving to draw our attention from the horrors of such a life.

Soon after the last event I was alone with our brave Hartley, who was standing on the outside of the house, making pins to fasten the logs together for an addition to our then one-room house. He came hastily to the door and called

out, "Look quick; the Indians are coming." I glanced up the road and saw about forty-five of them, one riding in advance. This one rode his pony on to Hartley with force enough to knock him down. As soon as he recovered himself he struck the pony such a blow as to fell it to the earth. The Indian was so surprised that he tumbled off his horse, which ran away. By that time the others had arrived. Then commenced the din of battle. It was to all appearances a terrible fight, their whips cracking, some of them shooting, the clashing of all their implements, the roaring of their horrible dialect, and occasionally a horrible oath in fair English. I could hear Hartley swearing profusely, and striking with the log pin. He called loudly to me to hand him the gun, but I would not. He was so mad that he tried to break down the door. I thought it was the Indians, and oh, how

JASON PARKER

I prayed for deliverance. Fifteen minutes was the time occupied, but it seemed like hours. At last all was quiet but a terrible clanging at the door. I supposed Hartley was killed, for they had made fuss enough to kill fifty men. I thought my time had come and nearly fainted, but managed to say I would not open the door. How relieved I was when I heard Hartley say, "For God's sake let me in; the bloody devils are gone." I opened the door, and what a sight! His hair (which was about three inches long) was standing straight up, his shirt nearly torn off, and vest gone—one of the Indians had worn it off. He flew at me with the exclamation, "D——n you, Mrs. Brewer, why didn't you hand me that gun? You don't know how badly I wanted to kill one of them red devils." I said, "If you had killed one of them they would have killed you, and then what would have

become of me?" "Oh, they would have taken you with them—such a brave, lovely person!" But he afterward acknowledged it was best for all of us that I did not give him the gun. The Indians were on a war expedition to the Pawnee reservation, and in four days they came back again. They ordered bread and milk. We gave them all the milk there was, but they thought we had more, and made an examination. I satisfied them by showing the place it was kept and the empty

MRS. MARY HILTON

pans. Then Mr. Brewer and myself and Hartley had to shake hands with the whole forty-five. It took us half a day to wait on them. They thought Hartley very brave not to be afraid of so many of them. They told him to come with them and they would let him have a Sioux wife. But he was still determined to have his revenge and kill one of them. This proved a very great detriment to us all, and was the cause of our losing all we had in the world, as will be shown later.

CHAPTER III.

MERRICK COUNTY.—1858–1870.

AS our readers have probably discovered before this time, the work of the historian of the frontier days is mainly one of compilation. The gathering of the fragments contributed by various ones of the early settlers, and the arrangement of these fragments into a somewhat more connected whole, is of more interest to both the old and new-timer than would be a mere synopsis by the author of the leading events of those days. So without further apology we give to the public again, after a lapse of twenty-four years, the account, first, of the legislative establishment of the county, as told by John L. Martin,* and, secondly, Wells Brewers' account of the political organization of the county.† Mr. Martin's record reads as follows:

In the autumn of 1858, the Legislature passed an act defining the boundaries of newly established counties and establishing the county seats. This act first brought Merrick County into being, defining its boundaries and fixing the county seat at "Elvira." At the time of the passage of this act, Henry W. De Puy was Speaker of the House of Representatives, being "the gentleman from Dodge County." His wife's maiden name was Elvira Merrick, and it was in honor of both himself and his lady that the county was named Merrick and the seat of justice located at "Elvira." The act was approved November 4, 1858, but to this day no one has ascertained exactly where "Elvira" was situated, unless that it was "beautifully located upon a paper in the office of Dr. Henry, of Omaha, and supposed by the fortunate possessor of corner lots, to be about two miles southwest of the present town of Clark's, on the old military road." It is contended, however, by "old-timers" who settled in that part of the county, that it was the design of the parties interested to locate the county seat upon or near the land now owned

*History of Nebraska, p. 1113.

†Courier, 1874.

and occupied by the family of C. B. Hartwell, about two miles southeast of Clark's Station. As no one "dabbled" heavily, however, in Elvira real estate, it is of no particular importance, except as a matter of historical curiosity and conscientiousness, whether the exact location of the paper county seat is fixed more closely than on Dr. Henry's wall, in Omaha. In 1858, it would have been impossible to do more toward informing people where was their county seat, as the central part of the State was not then surveyed.

Mr. Brewer thus tells the story of the county's political organization and early experiences:

In the winter of 1863 and 1864 the question of organizing the county first began to be agitated. John L. Martin was the first to move in the matter. The question was discussed for some months, pro and con, among the settlers. There were those who opposed the measure. Their reasons for so doing were, in the first place, that the step was unnecessary; that the few settlers settled along the road could get along as well without a county organization as with; that if an organization was effected it would remain for years a dead letter, there not being inhabitants enough to run the machinery of a county organization; and finally, that if such an organization should be effected, and kept up, the expense, falling upon so few, would be enormous and burdensome; far overbalancing all the benefits that could possibly arise. On the other hand it was contended, in reply, that the expense of a county organization could be absolutely nothing if the people chose to make it so; the officers could perform what little service would be required of them free of charge, and that the benefits of organization would be that election precincts would be established, and we would then enjoy the privilege of voting at the election—a privilege of itself worth all the trouble and cost of organizing. The question finally prevailed. Those opposed really took no active steps in opposition. A petition was forwarded to the commissioners of Platte County, the nearest organized county east, praying that a special election be called for the election of county officers, as provided by law. The petition was granted and the eighteenth day of April, 1864, fixed upon as the day of holding the election.

A week previous to the election day, a meeting was called for the purpose of selecting candidates for the various county offices. This meeting was held at the residence of J. G. Brewer, and was more generally attended than any meeting of the kind that has since been held in the county, and yet, for all that, the crowd in attendance was not large. The difficulty experienced at this meeting was altogether different from that which usually attends meetings of this kind. Generally the difficulty is to find offices for the candidates; on this occasion it was to find candidates for the offices. However, even at that early day, this difficulty was not found to be insuperable. Candidates were found, and a ticket made out. The nominees were as follows: County Commissioners, Jason Parker, Jesse Shoemaker and George Gelston; Sheriff, T. F. Parker; County Clerk, W. H. Mitchell; Treas-

urer, Wells Brewer; Prosecuting Attorney, H. N. Lathrop; Probate Judge, J. G. Brewer. The county was divided into three precincts, the Eastern, Middle and Western. The election in the Eastern precinct was held at Eagle Island stage station; in the Middle precinct at the house of Jason Parker; in the Western precinct at the house of Jesse Shoemaker. Although, at the meeting which nominated the candidates, everything seemed to pass off harmoniously, yet there must have been an undercurrent of dissatisfaction somewhere, for on the election day a new ticket was gotten up with a new set of candidates, so far as new candidates could be obtained, for nearly every man in the county was already a candidate for one or more offices. The fight was a particularly strong on the office of County Clerk, Mr. W. W. Burroughs being the candidate on the new ticket. The returns of the election were made to the County Clerk of Platte county. In the Eastern precinct six votes were cast; in the Middle nine and in the Western twelve. All the regular nominees were elected. Certificates of election were issued by C. B.

The house is Uncle Jason's ranch. John Kyes holds the reins; beside him is the stage agent, Thompson, while Ede Stout, of Chapman, stands between Uncle Jason's daughter Viola on the right and a Miss Hurley on the left.

Stilman, county clerk of Platte County. H. N. Lathrop took the oath of office before some officer authorized to administer the same, in Columbus, and came up and qualified the Probate Judge, who, in turn, administered the oath to the other officers elect, and the county organization became an accomplished fact.

The first meeting of the Commissioners was a special one called by the County Clerk and held some time in May. The business transacted was nominal, merely,

aside from approving the official bonds of the county officers. The organizing of a new county, and the transacting of county business, in those days, was very much like navigating the pathless ocean without chart or compass. The laws on that point were very crude and contradictory. Scattered as they were throughout the various session laws of territorial legislature and the Organic Act, the labor of hunting them up was no slight affair. But there was this redeeming feature about it. Everybody was free and easy in regard to the nice points of the law in those days. There was no U. P. Railroad Company to sue out injunctions, and no Grand Juries to indict if the strict letter of the law was not complied with. Yet no serious blunder occurred in the organization of the county, or in the management of its affairs for years. Perhaps this may only be owing to what is usually termed good luck. Perhaps, too, it may, in part, be owing to the fact that the temptation to malfeasance in office was not so great then as now. No officer then made money out of his office; no one made a living off the county; no one defrauded the county, for the county had nothing to be defrauded out of. Official honesty was, for a time at least, a necessity. But the time at length came when that necessity no longer existed. The time came when there began to be money in the treasury, and yet, for a long time thereafter, the officials managed the county affairs as carefully, as economically and as honestly as they did their own private business.

In the year 1864 considerable excitement was stirred up by the attempt of Hall County to "steal" a portion of western Merrick County. The course of this contest, which was not without reason on the part of Hall County, in that it was not well that Grand Island should be on their extreme eastern edge, is best told in the words of Judge Martin, who was himself a most prominent actor therein:

NOTE.—As no bridge crossed the Platte within the boundaries of Merrick County until 1875, such items as the following, taken from the Courier of June 18, 1874, and April 10, 1876, were not at all uncommon:

" 'DUCKED.'—One day last week, while a number of Hamilton County homesteaders who had been over to this place to do some trading, were crossing the Platte in a boat on their return home, their vessel capsized, pitching the whole party into the water. Quite a large amount of groceries and other goods which the party had purchased while here were either lost or damaged by the soaking they received, and one man by the name of Cunningham is said to have lost his pocketbook, containing $125 in greenbacks. It is supposed the accident was due in a great measure to the large amount of 'tanglefoot' which the party had taken 'on board.' Fortunately the water was not deep where they capsized; or the consequences might have been much more serious."

"We learn that Mr. Paro, who lives on the other side of the river (Platte), met with quite a narrow escape from drowning, while attempting to cross the stream with his team last Saturday night. He was in the water quite a while, and the horses were extricated with some difficulty."

In the winter of 1863-64, Frederick Hedde, of Hall County, was a member of the Legislature, elected from Merrick and Hall Counties, and the unorganized territory west of them, receiving a total of thirty-one votes. At this session, Hedde introduced a bill to attach six miles of Western Merrick County to Hall County. On Friday night at 10 oclock, January 29, 1864, John L. Martin received a letter from Hedde, telling him that the above bill had been introduced and passed a second reading. This matter required prompt action, and on Saturday a meeting was held and resolutions adopted, denouncing Hedde's action. Before night a remonstrance against such a course was signed by every citizen living within the six-mile strip. On that afternoon, and during Sunday, the remonstrance was presented to every citizen of Merrick County, signed and forwarded to Gov. Alvin Saunders, who received it ten hours after having signed Hedde's bill. A new bill was immediately introduced, repealing Hedde's, and was bitterly fought by Dr. Renni, Chairman of the Committee on Counties, and by Hedde himself. But the new bill passed the House, and was signed by the Governor *four days before the Legislature adjourned sine die.*.

CHAPTER IV.

INTERESTING EVENTS OF EARLY SETTLEMENT.

I. A DRY PLATTE.

TO the settlers of these later days the sight of the Platte River practically without water in it is not an uncommon or sensational one. Irrigation west of our county has from summer to summer absorbed the volume of water which in times past flowed through Merrick County, and left us but one or two shallow channels in the entire breadth of the mile-wide Platte. But to the early settler such a state of affairs was not only unheard of, but decidedly alarming. So when in the summer of 1863 the Platte ran entirely dry, that fact and the causes of the occurrence fixed themselves firmly in the minds of those who shared in the alarm which was produced. The story is well told by Wells Brewer in his "Recollections of an Old Settler:"

The year of 1863 is remembered by the old settlers of Merrick County as a remarkable one on two accounts; one is the very severe frost that occurred in the latter part of the month of August; the other that the Platte river was, during nearly the entire autumn, a bed of dry, drifting sand, a thing hitherto unprecedented in the memory of the oldest settler. It is probable that the like had not occurred for many years before, for even the Indians had no tradition of a similar occurrence and seemed as much surprised at the unwonted phenomenon as the whites. On one or two previous seasons the June rise had been but a slight affair, and the river had run very low during the hot months; but this year the June rise was scarcely perceptible and by the 20th of August the great river had, for hundreds of miles above its junction with the Loup, dived completely beneath its sandy bed. The reason was undoubtedly the light fall of snow in the Rocky Mountains the previous winter—a winter of unusual mildness throughout the whole United States. But this cause for the strange freak of the river was not wholly understood by the settlers at the time and many feared that some land slide in the mountains had diverted the currents of some of the tributary streams of the Platte, in which case

its dryness might be permanent. When the water was at its lowest stage, which was in the month of September, it could be obtained by digging in the lowest parts of the river bed to a depth of about two feet; but on the surface the sand was entirely destitute of moisture and was drifted about into all sorts of fantastic shapes by the wind; on some of the Islands it was piled in heaps to a height of five or six feet. Considerable difficulty was met with in obtaining water in sufficient quantities for stock. Digging in the sand was of no consequence as on reaching water the quick sand immediately filled the hole. The experiment of curbing was resorted to, but it was difficult to get even a curb to stand long as the cattle tramping in the sand outside of them soon broke them in. As a consequence of this, the stock in the valley suffered considerably for water. However one morning about the first of November, on looking far up the river, something was seen to glitter in the sun that did not look exactly like sand; that it was water could hardly be believed; but it *was* water. In a few hours little rivulets of clear water were winding their way down the broad waste of sand and the Platte river was itself again.

Few of us can realize the sensation which the early settler must have experienced when the fearful possibility, suggested by Mr. Brewer's article, dawned upon him—a dread lest "some land-slide in the mountains had diverted the currents of some of the tributary streams of the Platte, in which case its dryness might be permanent."

To the early settler the waters of the Platte were the promise of his continued existence, and their permanent absence meant the return to a desert of all the country in which he had planted his new home. It was this fear, rather than the actual dryness of the river, that made the year 1863 memorable among the men of those days, and causes its record here as one of the "interesting events of early settlement."

CHAPTER V.

MERRICK COUNTY'S MILITARY HISTORY.

FEW counties in Nebraska, we presume, can boast of the same percentage of loyalty among its early settlers as can Merrick County. When the war broke out there were twelve men in the county who were liable to military service, and of these seven faced the terrors of the battle field and honored the county from which they went. The story of their going and their fortune in war has, at our request, been furnished us by the first volunteer from the county, Mr. Frank Jewell, and we give it below in his own words, preceded by a few reminiscences which, while hardly bearing upon the subject in hand, we would not feel justified in omitting. Mr. Jewell's story is as follows:

At the beginning of the civil war there were residing in the territory at present known as Merrick County perhaps a dozen men who were subject to military duty and capable of bearing arms in their country's defense—that is, one dozen men between the ages of 18 and 45 years. Besides these, of course there were a good many boys under that age and some men too far advanced in years to be called to the defence of their flag. Out of the above number seven enlisted and served their country from the beginning to the end of the war, and all came through safely; and the writer of these lines knows of but one of them who has as yet crossed over to the other side of the dark river. Now in studying the history of our country in our boyhood days there would have been a link lacking if we could not have had a picture of the minute men firing on the red coats at Concord, or old Israel Putnam sliding down those impassable rocky cliffs upon his rearing charger. So, too, we think there would be something lacking from the history of Merrick County without a reference to its loyalty to the old flag in the days that "tried men's souls"—and constitutions, also. It would be somewhat like the tragedy of Hamlet with the ghost left out. If in placing these few items before your readers I should become absent minded or reminiscent the old vets of the county are at liberty to accuse me of adopting their old method, used in a "pinch," of "swapping lies."

My first recollections of the Platte Valley are of a bright, clear evening in

October, 1860, when, with a train of some fifteen or twenty wagons, we came winding over the hills from Omaha upon the military trail, and came in sight of the valley at the old Elk Horn ranch, just a little before sunset. The atmosphere was so clear that we could plainly see the trees on the Platte river at North Bend, 35 miles away, and nothing to intervene except a few houses at Fremont—perhaps half a dozen in all. That was a sight to enthuse the boy of eighteen who had since his thirteenth year been blessed mostly with hard knocks and the privilege of taking care of himself. There he saw thousands of acres waiting for the plow, with no one to object and nothing to pay. So you cannot blame him if he was a little enthusiastic and pulled out in the morning with a heart full of hope for brighter days in the future. Arriving at the old ranch conducted by Uncle Jason Parker on Oct. 20th, 1860, we met the first familiar face after a trip of about 500 miles, and at once took the course advised by a great statesman of later days and proceeded to "grow up with the country." Many things that would be strange and new to the people of the present time were seen in those days. I remember, for instance, the signs used at the most of the ranches—a piece of cracker box cover nailed to a cedar stake and ornamented with the following in lamp-black or red chalk:

FLOUR, COFFEE, SUGAR, BACON,
MOLASSES, TOBACCO, CIGARS,
AND WHISKEY.

Now this is not as comic or unique a sign as can be gotten up by our promoter of advertising in Central City, but is at least suggestive. It starts out with the staff of life, is re-enforced with slippery sweetness and ends at the road to d——nation. Another peculiar nuisance in early ranch life was the habit all pilgrims going in either direction had of asking so many questions. This resulted in the manufacture of another sign by the irrepressible Cyrus Parker, a youth at the ranch. To relieve the boys of spending so much useless breath he elaborated from his fertile mind the following and posted it on another board:

130 miles to Omaha
40 " " Columbus
20 " " Eagle Island
13 miles to Shoemaker's
70 " " Kearney
We came from York State
This is No Telegraph Office
We are going to live here
You ——— fool.

The latter part of which came near getting him a warm jacket from good Uncle Jason, and had to be rubbed out. The telegraph office needs a little explanation. At that time the Overland T. line had a station at Columbus and another at Johnson, on Wood river about 40 miles west of Parker's Ranch, and for the purpose

of repairing in case of accidents they had at Parker's what was called a "testing office," to find any breaks in the wire. This office was in a little box with the wire parted and each end covered by a brass plate, with a third plate to button across from one to the other to form the circuit, and a ground wire within reach. The test was made by placing a damp finger on one of the plates, after parting them, and touching the end of the ground wire to the tongue. If hot it was all O. K., but if cold someone had to go out and mend the wire—a trip of 20 miles and back. If the line was broken beyond our beat we could signal the opposite station—Columbus or Wood River—by parting the wire and tapping the brass plates with the metal key, this sound being conveyed by wire to the other station. This was in after years a reminder to the writer of the many lost opportunities of youth, for if we had only had brains enough at that time to have attached a hello tube to the plate and talked through it, instead of using the metal key to convey the sound, we might have been millionaires and the world would have had no need of Edison.

But I am wandering from my text and will have to get back to business. Along in the spring of 1861 a change came over the spirit of our dreams. The news of the firing upon Ft. Sumter was slowly wafted out over the plains per the Western Stage Co. to Columbus, and thence to the ranch per mule team loaded with usual amount of provisions and whiskey for the far west people. But the driver claimed that a S. C. was better than six yankees and we concluded that he must have been a good customer of his own merchandise.

The final result was that three of us boys pulled out for the Missouri river with three yoke of oxen and two wagons, and a few weeks' work in Iowa in the harvest field, with the boys passing by to enlist at Council Bluffs, was enough to remind the writer, at least, that it was his duty to go and hunt for that brave S. C. and take his share of the grief as foretold by the western mule driver. So upon the 7th day of August, 1861, he took the usual oath to serve our Uncle Sam for three years or during the war and was followed in close succession by the other six, whose record, so far as I can recall it to mind, is about as follows:

FRANK JEWELL.—Enlisted August 7th, 1861, in Dodge's Battery Light Artillery, afterwards known as the 2nd Iowa Independent Battery. Discharged August 8th, 1865, having served two enlistments.

GEO. THOMPSON.—Enlisted about Sep. 20th, 1861, in same organization. Served two terms and discharged at same time.

The battle flag of the 2nd Iowa Battery, now in the State House at Des Moines, Iowa, if I remember rightly, bears the following inscription, and these two Merrick County boys had a hand in the whole business: "New Madrid, Farmington, Apr. 14 and 22, Corinth Siege, Iuka, Corinth Oct. 3rd and 4th, Jackson 1st, Vicksburg, May 22nd, and Siege Jackson 2nd, Tallahatchie, Hurricane Creek, Tupello, Nashville, Spanish Fort."

ED PARKER.—Enlisted about December or January 1st, 1862, in 15th Iowa Infantry. Served also in 9th Kansas Cavalry, of which he was 2nd Lieutenant when discharged in July, 1865.

JOSEPH WHALEY.—Enlisted about Janaury 1st, 1861, in 15th Iowa Infantry; re-enlisted in the same and followed Sherman to the sea; was in all the racket seen by Crocker's Brigade and came out at the end of the war with no damage except that made by one small bullet which he caught in his foot at Shiloh.

CHARLEY HARTLEY (The boy spoken of already in this history as wanting to hurt an Indian).—Enlisted in the summer of 1862 in the 22nd Iowa Infantry and took his place as corporal on the color guard. Any one reading the history of the charge at Vicksburg on May 22nd, 1863, can form some idea of what he was doing at that time, as that regiment crossed the works and was driven out three times, the color company losing sixteen men out of thirty-two, all killed or wounded, and the color guard bringing the flag out safely. Afterwards the same boy from Merrick county put on a shoulder strap with two bars on it, and skipped all the grades of promotion from corporal to captain in his company. This must have atoned somewhat for his not being allowed to hurt a poor Indian. Speaking about "grit," he was not much lacking in the moral kind—A singular sample of a strict temperance boy on the plains. When his commission arrived the colonel got it and called up all the line and staff officers to his tent and sent the orderly for Hartley. He reported at the tent and found all sitting around the table discussing a full basket of champagne. "Now, Captain Hartley," said the colonel, handing him a paper, "here is your commission, and according to general usage it will be necessary for you to 'wet it'." Charley took the paper, and looking the colonel squarely in the eye replied, "Colonel, if for me to hold this commission it is necessary that I drink whiskey and make a hog of myself, then you can keep the paper—I don't want it," and left the tent. But he led his company to the end of the war; so I think he must have been close by his colors at all times.

HENRY C. MARTIN.—First enlisted with 3rd Colorado Infantry on the 22nd of May, 1861, but failing to obtain enough men this was consolidated with the 1st Colorado Cavalry. Was then detailed under Gen. Auger as assistant provost marshal. Served in all a little over three years and four months. Through a mistake of the enlisting officer his name was entered as Wm. C. Martin, and to this name is credited his entire military record.

BENJAMIN HURLEY.—First enlisted in 1st Nebraska; after serving full time there, enlisted in Black Horse Battalion.

We consider that Merrick County was as loyal to her country as any county in the United States, sending seven volunteers out of twelve residents subject to military duty. Their terms of enlistment aggregate twenty-five years' service. It is true no one of them ever laid down his life for his country; no one of them wears an empty sleeve or a patent leg; such honor was not theirs to achieve. But if our Uncle Sam could have been consulted about the matter in the latter part of the year 1863, I think he would have said that there was more good, genuine cash value in seven case-hardened, acclimated and well disciplined old vets than there could be in the same number of dead heroes.

CHAPTER VI.

INTERESTING EVENTS OF EARLY SETTLEMENT.

II. THE INDIANS AGAIN.

POSSIBLY in the foregoing chapters we have touched too lightly upon the trials to which the pioneers of our county were subject. It is, therefore, the purpose of this chapter to relate some of the experiences of those early days in the words of one who shared in them and realized what they meant The story of the abuse and indignities heaped upon the pioneers by the red man, who sought by that means to prevent the encroachment of the white man upon his old-time hunting grounds, is told by Mrs. J. G. Brewer, being a continuation of her account as found in Chapter II, and is as follows:

About a month after the last mentioned escapade of Hartley,* there were about 1300 Indians passed our house in one day. They were Sioux, Arapahoes and Cheyennes. It took them six hours to get out of sight. They did not molest any of the ranches going down, but returning they committed about every depredation possible. They were incensed against the white settlers because, as they reasoned, the whites had helped the Pawnees give them a splendid threshing. The government had given the Pawnees a small cannon, and the Sioux and their friends very naturally concluded that this meant the white man was in sympathy with the Pawnees. The nearest assault on this occasion was that on Mr. Hudson, about two miles below the stage station. They killed his turkeys, chickens and pigs, and surrounded the little house. Mr. and Mrs. Hudson were an aged couple who had lost all they had in the east, and being too proud to depend upon the charity of relatives and friends, had come west and were happy even if they were poor. They had been afraid of the small parties of Pawnees that had often stopped to beg, but had become somewhat used to them. But this tremendous outpour of Indians was too much for them.

The Indians then came to the stage house, where there were only two men;

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*Chapter II, pp. 16-17.

who were of course helpless in the presence of so many of the enemy. They filled the house so full that they frightened Mrs. Cummings greatly. Then they took down the garments from the wall (that was a fashionable wardrobe in Nebraska in those days), appropriating everything they wished. One of the most horrible looking Arapahoes donned little Jenny Cumming's hat. Then they went to the barn and contented themselves with cutting the straps from stage coaches and harness. They next visited Mr. Hill's, but as there was a large encampment of Pilgrims near they did not do much damage, except the shooting of a few chickens.

Then came our turn. We were gone from home, leaving Hartley there. The first ones who came up turned onto the Island. Hartley, not seeing or knowing of the main body, took his gun and pursued the Island party (recognizing them as Sioux), for the purpose of killing at least one of them. He would never explain the cause of his long absence, or tell whether he killed any Indians or not while there.

The large party was at our place in ten minutes. Finding no resistance, they destroyed everything we had except the stove. The furniture to the stove was all gone, one window broken, dining table in a dozen pieces, and chickens all killed, with the exception of an old black hen. She came in from the prairie with fifteen chickens and as she was the mother of thirty-five we concluded she must have had a fight. The canary bird, hanging down from the highest peak of the roof, was undisturbed. Just imagine our coming home! Nothing to cook, nothing to eat, no place to sleep! We slept on the ground that night. Mr. Brewer had his overcoat, I had my shawl, and Hartley slept in a hay stack. We were too worn out not to accept of some rest, although it was pervaded with fitful dreams with the scalping knife as a subject. We had only gotten into condition to rest by reasoning that there was no danger that night, when a loud rap upon the door brought us to our feet. I said "It is the Indians." My husband said, "You foolish girl, don't you know that is a white man's knock? We'll open the door and see what he wants." He did not wait, but came in without being bid. He said he was tired out from being pursued by two horsemen and had been accused of stealing a horse, and could not take another step even if they take him. We related the day's adventure and told him there was no bed. He made no reply but lay down under a broken bedstead There was no more sleep for us, for that man snored in such a manner as to sound like the roaring of a cyclone. He did not awaken until daylight; then such hurrying to get away—"Great heavens! I shall be caught! What's my bill?" "Nothing," we told him. He threw down four dollars. "Don't tell I staid here." He lost three more as he crawled out from under the broken bedstead. His pursuers arrived about noon, but not a word did they get from us.

Well I told Mr. Brewer if he wanted to spend his days in such an ungodly place as this he might, but I should journey afoot and alone if necessary, to the home of my youth. I made him promise to give me the seven dollars. By that

time we were getting really hungry. As Mr. Hill knew how we were situated, and lived only half a mile away, we concluded to walk to the stage station—Mr. Cummings, a most estimable man, kept the station—but Mr. Hill called us in and bade us eat, drink and be merry, "for tomorrow you will die"—be scalped, he meant. After partaking of a hearty dinner we went to work in earnest. The neighbors loaned us some goods for a time, and I went to baking bread for the traveling and footsore Pilgrims. Mrs. Hill come to visit me. She said "Don't feel so bad; we may be served the same way." I told her I would like to have her stay to tea if it were possible. What was my chagrin when she said she would. I found an old dry goods box, and set the table on that. The meal consisted of bread and a prairie chicken I had trapped in a "figure four" (I often found a chicken in my trap). We had knots of wood for chairs, and one knife and fork. We quarreled over who would have them. Mrs. Hill declared the chicken just splendid—no epicure could deny that. There was more actual merriment in that meal, according to the number, than at the grandest table in the world. But where is the compensation for such a loss? We had worked so hard to get our belongings together. Even the wedding garments my father gave me were utilized by the savages. How grand a squaw must have appeared in a rose-colored silk dress.

Mr. Hartley had left us shortly after the time when he chased the Indians on to the Island. He felt very badly for he realized that he was principally to blame for the loss of our goods; but he was poor and could make no amends. The last we ever heard of him he was a captain in the army. He was a faithful and brave young man.

Some six months or so later there was another scare, which made it seem at the time as if there were no more safety. Mr. Wood, who lived about eighty miles above us, had brought his wife as far as the station to send her east. He was compelled to go to Denver, leaving two men with her for protection, but he had been on the road but a day when he met a large party of Sioux. Becoming alarmed for the safety of his wife, he turned back and was nearly home when a small regiment of regulars overtook him. He told them to stop at his place to see what was going on. The Indians were there and had Mrs. Wood lashed to a pony about to leave. She was frightened almost beyond recovery, but the Colonel and his men came upon them so suddenly that they were taken by surprise and took her from the pony on the double quick, and then were off as fast as possible, the regiment after them. Their fresh horses were too fleet for the cavalry, which was going east to the last call and was tired out. The cavalry then went on to the front, joining Brigadier General Mitchell's other regiment. Gen. Mitchell and staff were at one place. He was a splendid specimen of a soldier and very brave. He simply ordered bread and milk, asking for nothing more than the common soldier. The regulars as a general thing were cowards and did not try to subdue the red men; at all events they conducted themselves far worse after their absence.

Many women left when the government protectors were gone. Mrs. Wood's adventure frightened a great many. They had only gotten a few miles below us when a party of Indians crossed the river at Warm Slough, coming directly to Mr. Morley's house. Mrs. Morley was milking the cow. They came up to her, pulled the rings from her ears through the flesh, killed the cow, chickens and pigs, and broke their furniture to pieces, throwing away things they could not carry into the slough. The Indians told them they would kill them if they did not leave immediately. They permitted them to yoke a pair of cattle and take a few bed-clothes and garments with them. Thus the poor aged couple left in the middle of the night, Mrs Morley suffering beyond description from fear and her bleeding ears. This, together with Mrs. Wood's adventure, caused a general stampede of nearly all the women of the vicinity. It was supposed at that time that Mr. and Mrs. Morley were killed and secreted, as they were absent and blood was seen in every direction, Mr. Morley came back in a short time and related the experience of that horrible night to those who were left in the neighborhood. He said he knew there were white desperadoes with the Indians, as he had seen one when they were crossing the river to the south side. Some of the women went away on the stage coach, but we were too poor to enjoy that luxury. Mr. Parker had taken his wife to Iowa previous to this, as she was too delicate to undergo the constant tumult—Indians, horse thieves, soldiers, white people stealing and marauding in general. Mr. Parker had a beautiful span of bays taken from his stable, and then he concluded to take the remainder of his live stock to a place of safety. The stock consisted of another span of horses nearly worn out, four cows and four nice fat hogs. I went as far as Council Bluffs with him. His youngest son, Frank, remained on the ranch, as his father intended to return as soon as was prudent.

We were absent three months, and returning we hardly arrived at Warm Slough before the hogs began to show signs of weariness. As it was very warm he drove them into the slough. "We will eat a lunch," he said, "I think we can drive the pigs all right." I prepared the lunch and then his son went to get the hogs, but shouted back that one was dead and the other three would not budge an inch. Accordingly the others had to be loaded into the covered wagon. We were ten days on the road and I thought the smell of those hogs would kill me. The boy walked most of the time. Uncle Jason would get in and ride a few minutes at a time, and so their perfume did not reach his nostrils. The fourth day I told them I could not stand it to be wedged in among the creatures any longer. "Oh," he said, "you make too much fuss. I don't smell anything to speak of." I told him to get into the wagon where I was obliged to sit and remain one hour. He took the lines and I walked. He was in there but three quarters of an hour before he jumped out and said, "Good Heavens, Mrs. Brewer, I don't see how you stood it." When it was time to stop at night the pigs were unloaded, the pen cleaned, and everything aired. It took five days more to perform the journey, but I walked the most of the way. We arrived at the Bluffs the eleventh day, completely worn out. He would not let me stop on the road as I was tempted to do. He said, "I

told Mr. Brewer I would take care of you and I have haven't I now?" I told him, "Certainly you have, so far as food and perfumery are concerned." Then with a hearty peal of laughter he said, "I would rather be scalped than to take that journey again. If ever I get back I'll never stir an inch for them—don't you say so?"

When an Indian scare was announced, as there often was, Uncle Jason would generally say "I don't believe it! That come from 'blabbers'." I regret to say such was the case in many instances, the purpose being to get the settlers to leave their places that they might occupy the same without expense. At one time a stage driver came down the road shouting that there were one thousand hostiles not far away. It frightened a number beside myself but it was a false alarm. I lost a churning of cream by it. There was certainly enough reality to make the blood of the timid run cold.

One day news came that a couple of men had been killed up the river a little ways.* One of them had been our hired man a short time before. Mr. Brewer went out with a body of men to search for the bodies of the murdered men and I was left alone. That was to me the most melancholy day ever spent. The stillness of death pervaded the atmosphere. Not a person near—nothing but a very intelligent Newfoundland dog I had in the house. I was lying on the couch when suddenly he gave a sharp, quick growl. I sprung to my feet to see two windows darkened with the worst looking Indians I ever saw. Curley (the dog) came to me and I whispered, "Take them, Curley!" Quick as lightning he was through a pane of glass after them. His movements were so rapid and earnest—snapping, biting their ankles, growling like a tiger—that he soon had them running on the double quick. When he came back he was bleeding, but I could not decide whether it was from the broken glass or arrows from the Indians, or both. He came and licked my hands, lying down immediately from exhaustion. He was far ahead of some of the men, for while they were studying what was best to do the dog would have it done. I knew him to bleed one Indian a quart, which cost me three loaves of bread, a large piece of beef, about a pound of coffee, and the saying of my prayers. After staunching the blood the victim made me get on my knees, he pointing heavenward with the most hideous gestures. I imitated him as well as I could for awhile, but concluding I had done penance enough I refused the rest of the performance. He said he would kill my dog if I refused to imitate him. As I was alone I had been afraid, but this made me mad, and I said, "Curley, bite him!" Again he flew. I had to follow to get the dog away. At another time Mr. Brewer, being absent, left a very good hearted gentleman to protect me. It was nearly morning and I was sleeping behind some heavy curtains, when I heard the voice of the man saying, "Arise, Mrs. Brewer, the house is surrounded by Indians. Good bye, you have been good to me." By the time I was ready to go out to see what was going on the windows were black with the red men. They shook my

*The account of this is taken up in detail in a later chapter, under the heading "Merrick County's Early Criminals."

hand until it was lame, laughing and pointing toward the river, where the white man was running with the fleetness of a deer. At another time this great protector of mine mistook a large number of soldiers for Indians. He ran to the house with the hurried exclamation, "My God, the red men are upon us now in earnest." I ran out and climbed on top of the house for a better view. Then I said, "Those are the troops, I believe—volunteers." "Volunteers? Not much; you can't fool me. I can't do you any good; try and take care of yourself," and he ran for the bottom. I said, "If you don't come back and stay with me, if it is Indians I will send them to kill you. No danger of their hurting you; you look too much like a monkey. We shall both be safe; they will be wondering what kind of an animal you are. If you will come back I will put you in a cage or make a jumping jack of you. Don't you see plainly they are soldiers?" And so they were.

THE INDIAN SCARE OF 1864.

As the reader has already concluded from the foregoing narrative, early comers to Merrick County found the noble red man yet unsubdued, and frequently inclined to go on the war path. From Mr. Brewer we gain the following description of the conditions which pre-prevailed just prior to the great "Indian scare of '64:"

Rumors of a threatened Indian war began to be more frequent than ever as the summer of 1864 drew near to its close. The occasion of these rumors was not that any overt act of hostility had been committed, but that the conduct of several tribes was, in a general way, suspicious. The great increase of overland travel, caused by the discovery of gold at Pike's Peak, had always been a source of great dissatisfaction to the Indian tribes of the plains. The erection of a telegraph line and the establishment of a line of stages to Denver and the pony express to San Francisco they had looked upon with a jealous eye from the very first. And now, as it became known to them that the construction of a railroad across their hunting grounds was in contemplation, they were fully aroused and resolved to rid their country of white men.

This spirit of dissatisfaction among the Indians was observed with various degrees of fear by the pioneers. But before long attacks on immigrant trains and on traders from Ft Kearney left no doubt as to the hostile intentions of the red men. The realization of this caused a veritable panic, and, in the case of Merrick County, an almost total depopulation. Old settlers inform us that during the continuance of this stampede a steady stream of eastward - moving settlers flowed by every day, visible as far as the eye could reach both up and

down the river. Pigs and chickens and many implements were left to their fate—which was to be taken up again by the settlers as they returned from their eastward flight. The winter of 1864 found hardly a soul in the county aside from Messrs. Brewer and Eugene Hilton. One of the most interesting episodes of this great scare was the flight of the county clerk, W. H. Mitchell, who thought his life worth more than his office, and took his departure for the east, never returning to fill his unexpired term, to do which Wells Brewer was subsequently chosen.

But Fort Kearney marked about the eastern limit of the Indian depredations, and these gradually becoming less, the majority of the fugitives gradually returned and resumed their interrupted labor upon their new homes.

The terror of the Indian scare was undoubtedly augmented by the fact that the majority of the masculine population of Nebraska was at the time in the east and south, fighting for the preservation of the union and the freedom of the slave. In fact, it was openly charged at the time that agents of the south were inciting the Indians to their depredations, in the hope that the members of the army from the west would be drawn from the field of battle and sent to the defense of their homes. But whatever the cause of the uprising, it was at the time a most threatening factor in the life of our early settlers, and bade fair for a time to postpone for years the development of our county. Happily, however, the danger was short, and the work of settlement and civilization soon resumed.

Before passing to another subject we have thought it best to introduce at this point a letter written to the Omaha Bee in the early part of the present year by Wm. McEndree, regarding an historic medal which came into his possession while a resident of this place. The date of the events mentioned therein is later than that of our next chapter, but it seems appropriate here as a pleasant contrast to the scenes of savagery which are recorded against the red man of 1864. The letter reads as follows:

I frequently have inquiries if I still have in my possession the famous Jackson Indian medal shown at the expositions of our country in the last fifteen years

The only way I have of answering these inquiries and keeping it fresh in the memory of interested ones is to reply through the Bee. Yes, this valuable relic is still in my possession. I have just had it returned from Tiffany Brothers, New York. It was sent there as an attraction for a window show for three months. The medal was first brought into public notice at Chicago in 1874, at the exposition held at that time, at Philadelphia in 1875, at New Orleans Cotton exposition in 1885, and at Denver Mineral exposition in 1883. Many of your readers may be interested to know a part of the history of this medal and how it came into my possession. The winter of 1871-72 was very severe, depriving the Indians of the opportunity to hunt. In February, 1872, the chief, Young Spanna Horse, came to me, while a resident of Lone Tree, Nebr., and deposited the medal with me as security for supplies for his family, promising to redeem it as soon as the weather would permit the Indians to hunt. By his negligence I was permitted to hold this medal one year before he made an effort to redeem his pledge. I showed him a disposition to buy the medal and by a few coaxing presents, he gave me full possession of it on condition that I should keep it and that he might see it whenever he called for that purpose. This was complied with so long as he lived.

The history of the medal was written by Sergeant Cody of old Fort Kearney. It contains all that could be ascertained by white men, and it read thus: "In the early '20's of this century there roamed over the plains of what now is known as Nebraska and the western hills of Iowa a tribe of Indians known as the Pawnees. Among their chiefs was one named Spanna Horse, a noted and famous warrior, and during the first administration of Andrew Jackson as president of the United States there was a peace council held at or near where the city of Council Bluffs, Iowa, is now situated, and from such councils it has taken its name. This medal was presented to this chief on one of these occasions in 1829. Shortly after this date Spanna Horse became a scout and guide for our government and acted in this capacity up to his death, which occurred at Elm Creek, Nebr., in 1862. Young Spanna Horse falling heir to his tribal effects, among them this medal, handed it down to the present owner." Sergeant Cody tells us that Chief Spanna Horse was always friendly to the whites, and in one instance of his recollection he reduced a chief named Ter-ri-me-coux for killing a white man in disobedience to the treaty. He often enlisted his warriors in the United States service to aid in keeping the Sioux Indians in subjection. This great chief carried the token of love and respect about his neck strung on a thong made from the sinews of a deer until the 14th day of August, 1862, being then 33 years of age, at which time he was killed in battle with the Sioux. There are still a few of the old settlers of Nebraska who remember this chief and have seen the medal on his neck, and no doubt would recognize it at this date. In the fall of 1874 the Pawnee Indians, having ceded their lands or reservation, now known as Nance County, Nebraska, to the government, were removed to lands allotted them in Indian Territory. On the march down overland Young Spanna Horse died, and on his deathbed requested a white man's burial, a thing very rare among the Indians at that date. The greatest

value attached to the medal is that it is the only one in existence of that date from President Jackson's administration to any Indians on our frontier. Its preservation and its age makes it still more valuable. WILLIAM MCENDREE.

CHAPTER VII.

INTERESTING EVENTS OF EARLY SETTLEMENT.

III. THE COMING OF THE UNION PACIFIC.

THOSE familiar with the building of the great transcontinental railroad will easily recall the wonderful changes which it wrought in the country through which it passed. We of the second generation have heard our fathers tell of the coming of the "iron horse," and it is from their accounts that we must glean the information necessary for this chapter. Consequently we will offer no apology for taking almost verbatim Mr. Brewer's narrative of the coming of the railroad and what it meant to the people of our county in those days.

"With the year 1865," says Mr. Brewer, "closed the era of pilgrims and ranches. Before another autumn the yell of the locomotive superseded the crack of the bull-whacker's whip. The slow-jogging stage coach gave way to the rattling and rushing train of cars. The commerce of the plains found a different method of transportation. Horse flesh had had its day. Honest bone and sinew that consumed the corn and oats of the settler at such remunerative prices were soon compelled to stand aside. It was a change in no wise for the better to the settlers that then occupied the Platte valley. Upon the principle of the greatest good to the greatest number it *was* a change for the better; but it completely upset and flattened out the occupations of the then settlers of Merrick County. The majority of the settlers were utterly unable to comprehend the greatness of the change that was about to take place, and of course failed to provide for it.

"During the winter of 1865-6 the railroad was built to a few miles west of Fremont. In the spring of 1866 the great race for the 100th meridian fairly commenced between this road and the Kansas branch.

In the month of February contracts were let for getting out all the cross ties that could be obtained on the uncultivated islands of the Platte, and every preparation was made to push the work forward as rapidly as possible as soon as spring should open. The grading was let in sub-contracts, so that the second hundred miles could all be done almost simultaneously. Grading parties were on early in the month of April, as soon as the frost was out of the ground. In a little less than a month the line was graded through Merrick County. Before the spring opened it began to be the talk that the company intended to lay the track at the rate of half a mile a day. Few people could believe that it would be done; but when the time came the track was put down at a rate that fully equalled that. So complete was the organization and so thoroughly was everything systematized that the rate at which the rails were put down gradually increased. On the fourth day of July, 1866, the construction train could be plainly seen from what is now Central City, and before the end of the month the road was completed through this county.

"The building of the railroad brought a great accession to the population of the counties along its line. The majority of those who then came were honest laborers. A few, however, were desperadoes and horsethieves, some of whom were lured here by the prospect of plunder, and others had fled hitherward to escape the consequences of crimes committed elsewhere. Up to this time there had never been a lawsuit in the county; all the differences arising had been settled without violence. But the criminal record could not long remain a blank while the Union Pacific was in course of construction." Under another heading—"Merrick County's Early Criminals"—we give the record of crimes which followed the advent of the railroad.

But the railroad was here, and evidently here to stay, and the inhabitants of our county began to gradually shape their lives accordingly. The first movement was one which brought the "towns" from the river to the railroad, and the gradual separation of the people into town and country life. This, however, was not accomplished instantaneously and is a subject we will leave for discussion in a later chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

INTERESTING EVENTS OF EARLY SETTLEMENT.

IV. SCHOOL ORGANIZATION.

FOR this subject, as for the former one, we are indebted to a former historian, Mr. John L. Martin, who at the Centennial Celebration of 1876 embraced in his history the facts which are contained in this chapter.

In July, 1866, when the county commissioners resolved to levy a tax of $100 to defray expenses, they made no provision whatever for schoolhouses. But in October the citizens living in the western part of the county resolved to take the educational problem into their own hands. On the 20th of that month John L. Martin, Claus Stoltenberg and Wm. Hayter were elected a "Board of Directors of District No. 1." A log schoolhouse was erected, by subscription, and covered with willow brush and sod. It cost less than $100. In this building, Miss Ellen Abbott (afterward Mrs. Dodge) taught the first school during the succeeding winter. In April the lady received her recompense in the shape of $33 of public money. In December, 1866, Mr. Martin was appointed examiner of teachers, and the next year was elected county superintendent of public instruction. After five districts had been organized, it was discovered that the act creating the office had not been signed by the speaker of the house, and was, therefore, no law at all. It was not until April, 1869, that this individual attached his name to a bill creating the office, when it came legally into existence. Edward Parker was appointed to assume the duties and responsibilities of the position.

CHAPTER IX.

MERRICK COUNTY'S EARLIEST CRIMINALS.

THE first crime in Merrick County of which we have any record was the theft of a pair of mules from an old man by the name of Wood, who made use of his mules and wagon as a pioneer "freight," by which supplies from Omaha were conveyed to the ranches in the neighborhood of Kearney. On his return trip one morning in May Mr. Wood was accosted by a couple of well-dressed Irishmen, who asked him if they might share the tediousness of his journey to Omaha. The prospect of company was not disagreeable to the old gentleman as he thought of the long and lonesome journey, and he gladly made room for them. The Irishmen proved most entertaining company and, as if in gratitude for his kindness took the care of his teams off his hands. They journeyed thus until they reached Brewer's Ranch. As customary, the night was spent there, Mr. Wood putting up at the house and the two Irishmen, for lack of better accommodations, bundling up in their blankets outdoors near the stable. But when Mr. Wood arose early the next morning and made his way to the barn he found both the Irishmen and his horses missing. The thought that they might have gotten loose and wandered away was soon dispelled by the discovery that a saddle and bridle were also missing from the ranch barn. Pursuit was at once began, and their track, made across cultivated ground at the very beginning, was easily followed. Four days after the loss of the mules, one of them wandered into Wood River, and, the notice of theft and description of property having been sent east and west by telegraph, was identified and held to await developments. Before long one of the Irishmen came inquiring after the stray mule, and was at once seized. Having been compelled

to disclose the whereabouts of his partner, both were secured and taken to Omaha for safe keeping, as horse-stealing was still considered a capital crime by many people in Merrick County.

The second criminal of our new county fared worse than his Irish predecessors, although his original crime was no greater. It was only a short time after Mr. Wood lost his mules that a German tramp stole a horse from the barn of Chas. Combs, the horse belonging, however, to John Kyes. The thief was tracked to the bank of the river, where it was determined that he had crossed over, it afterwards being discovered that during the crossing he nearly foundered, and having gotten across was immediately taken in charge by a traveler who was suspicious of the German's haste and early crossing, and forced to go to the ranch of J. T. Biggs. The owner of the horse, which was recognized here, was notified, and with some of the early unofficial preservers of the peace, known as "regulators," came down and took possession of both horse and man. The latter was tied to the horse's tail and thus taken across the river, after which, on account of his ugly actions, the thief was taken to the timber near the old lone tree and "strung up," although the rope broke twice during the operation.

The third and worst crime of our early days went entirely without punishment. In January, 1868, John Vieregg, with a neighbor, Claus Gottsch, and accompanied by the latter's son and a hired boy, were camped upon the Loup for a hunting excursion. Toward evening of the first day Messrs. Vieregg and Gottsch started out for a hunt, leaving the two boys at the camp to take care of the team. When they returned they found the two boys murdered, and the horses gone. As there was no signs of resistance, it has always been presumed that they were killed while asleep by some wandering Indian or Indians. Nothing definite concerning their death has ever come to light, and it will doubtless always remain one of the deep mysteries of our county history.

A fourth crime—if that term can be appropriately applied to the deeds of the Indians—was committed in 1869. On the night of June 14th two horses were stolen from the pasture of John L. Martin. The account of this and the tragic outcome of an attempt to secure the

thieves and the stolen property we give below in the words of Wells Brewer:

On the morning of the 15th of June, 1869, Mr. William Shoulders, who at that time was in the employment of the McCathrons', found that a mule that he had picketed out the night before had been stolen. That it was a theft was apparent from the fact that the portion of the lariat which remained had not been broken but had been smoothly cut with a knife. Neither Shoulders nor anyone else dreamed that there were any hostile Indians near; it was supposed to be the work of some petty horse thief, or perhaps of some "tramp" or deserter who, finding the mule beside the road, had taken him to ride a few miles. From the tracks, or some other indications, the owner of the mule was led to believe that he had taken up the road, or had at least started in that direction. Taking a halter in his hand, and declaring his intention to recover his mule at any cost, Shoulders set out in the direction he supposed the thief had taken. When he reached Martin's he found that two horses were missing from there. They had been taken from the small pasture lot on the immediate bank of the river. At this point the river is free from islands and nothing interrupted the view of the other side. For some time before Shoulders came up a horse had been noticed grazing on the other side of the river. It was thought that the horse had resembled one of the missing horses. It was thought a little strange that the horse remained grazing so long in one place; but without stopping to weigh probabilities, or in the least counting the risk or the danger, Shoulders and a young man named John Sanford at once proposed to cross over. The river was very high, the June rise being at its height, and the morning was cool—even cold; there had been quite a severe frost the night before. Crossing the river under such circumstances was no pleasant nor easy task; but divesting themselves of all superfluous clothing, and entirely unarmed they plunged boldly in; those on this side watching, and waiting the result. The crossing was toilsome and tedious; sometimes the men would be wading in water a few inches deep, and sometimes they would be struggling in the stiff current up to their armpits and again they would entirely disappear except their heads as they swam across some deep channel. Sanford being the most active and the best swimmer always kept the lead, sometimes being a rod or two in advance of his companion. The horse was still quietly grazing on the side of the bluff. At length they reached the opposite shore and began to ascend the steep bank. They had hardly reached the summit of this bank when they turned and hurriedly sprang back into the water. That instant some ten or fifteen mounted men galloped up and commenced firing upon them. A high north wind was prevailing at the time, and the report of the guns could not be heard, but the smoke of each discharge could be distinctly seen. The two men after they sprang into the water were lost sight of. By the splashing it appeared that some of the men on horse back rode down into the water. In all some fifteen or twenty shots were fired. After about fifteen minutes spent in hurried preparation the party of

horsemen rode away over the bluffs out of sight and all was quiet. No doubt could then be entertained as to the character of these mounted men; they were a party of hostile Indians.

The news of what had taken place rapidly spread, and by noon quite a company of men had assembled. Preparations were at once made for crossing over. It was a dangerous, and in some respects, a fool-hardy venture. It might easily be that only a part of the Indians had left and that others were lying in wait in anticipation that more white men would come over. This was duly considered before it was decided to make the attempt; but the bare possibility that one or both of the unfortunate men might be lying concealed in the willows, wounded and needing help, overbore every other consideration. About half a dozen young men, as well armed as the circumstances would permit, crossed over. I regret that I cannot give the names of the men composing this party as they are deserving of all praise for thus risking their lives for the chance of aiding a fellow creature. They reached the other side without any difficulty save that from the cold and rushing waters of the river. The Indians were all gone and it was fortunate that they were, for, to say nothing about the great advantage a lurking party of Indians would have over men waist deep in that swift current, the revolvers of the white men, the only arms which they carried, were nearly all rendered useless by having been more than once under water. A rod or two from the water's edge, but screened from observation from the north side by an abrupt ridge, they found the remains of an Indian camp fire. Near this to their horror they discovered a fresh human scalp; by the color of the hair it was recognized as that of Shoulders. Strange that it should have been left here; it must have been dropped accidentally by the savage who had torn it from the head of the dying man. Some little search was made for the bodies of the two men but nothing further was discovered. The wind was now blowing a perfect gale from the north and very cold for the season; they were fast becoming so chilled and benumbed by the cold, that, fearing that if they delayed their return longer some of them would be unable to stem the current of the river, they at once abandoned the search and returned.

These four deeds comprise the annals of our early criminal history. Nothing at all equal to them has since transpired in our county life, although the murderer's knife has occasionally all but accomplished the death of an enemy. This has almost without exception, however, been owing to the effects of strong drink, and not to any natural criminal instinct.

CHAPTER X.

INTERESTING EVENTS OF EARLY SETTLEMENT

V. THE GREAT TORNADO OF JULY, 1871.

WE turn with a feeling of relief from the criminal record. But we are not yet through with the sad annals of our early life. Few of the older members of our community have forgotten the "Great Tornado" which in July, 1871, descended so destructively upon the county. In his centennial day speech Mr. Martin briefly describes the occurrence thus:

On the 5th of July, 1871, about six o'clock in the evening, a tornado or waterspout crossed the country, going in nearly an easterly course. It destroyed everything in its path for a width of about 200 feet. It lifted the roof from the Lone Tree depot, destroyed a part of Bryant's Hotel, destroyed a blacksmith shop and some small houses, scattered a good part of Traver & May's lumber yard, and about one mile east of town destroyed the house of Elnathan Phelps, where he and his four children were eating supper. They were carried some eighty feet into the air, and cast to the ground about eighty yards from where the building stood. The dead body of Mr. Phelps was found hanging in a cottonwood tree, while his children were found lying among the debris around him. Strange as it may seem, the children all recovered without suffering any serious injury. Some portions of the house and furniture were found nearly two miles away.

CHAPTER XI.

INTERESTING EVENTS OF EARLY SETTLEMENT.

THE FAMOUS BLIZZARD OF '73.

AN interesting and most curious circumstance connected with the early days is vouched for by Mr. James Berryman, who says that previous to the year of greatest immigration (1870) the coming of the seasons was as regular as clockwork. "We all knew," says Mr. Berryman, "that on the day before Christmas we must have our barns banked up, our fuel and food supplies provided for, and be prepared for winter. In the fall of 1870 the new settlers inquired as to when they should expect winter, and we told them, 'no danger at all before Christmas; winter never misses Christmas a week either way.' " But with that winter, for some cause or other, the regularity of the seasons vanished, and the immigrants who had accepted the old settler's advice found themselves early in November at the mercy of a severe western winter. Since that time the winter season has been capricious, sometimes short and at other times spreading itself all over the months from November to mid-April.

The year of 1873 was one of the latter kind. From a lesser storm in 1872 at about the same time, however, our pioneers had learned not to be too sure of good weather before May. Consequently the great blizzard of 1873 found them not so illy prepared as would have been the case five years earlier.

On the evening of the 13th of April, 1873, wise men of the county shook their heads and declared that before the next morning there would be a "tight blizzard." Their prediction was fulfilled. At about 12 oclock that night the storm began, and the settlers awoke the next morning to find themselves literally buried alive by the snow which

had fallen during the night. A terrific north wind, swirling and eddying continually, drove the snow with such a force that at the height of the storm no one could face it long and live. Men sat about their red-hot stoves and endeavored to keep themselves warm, venturing out only when absolutely necessary to look after their stock. For three days and four nights the storm raged, and when it ended fully one-fourth of the live stock in the county had perished.

Many experiences, some sad and some amusing, have been carried in the minds of those who underwent the trial of the great storm. We are able, however, to give only a few, as indicative of the intensity of the storm and the alarm which it occasioned among the people.

The first and saddest incident of this memorable blizzard was the death of a young man, Barnhouse by name. The boy started from the Central City House to the printing office, then situated on the corner west of Larsen's implement house. When he did not return in a reasonable time inquiry was made, and it was found that he had not reached the office. A searching party of several men was organized, and joining hands they went south for a mile, and returned in the face of the blizzard, but found no trace. After the storm a party found the boy's body frozen into the ice of the Platte, near Parker's Island, only a short distance from some bushes whose protection, had he reached them, might have saved his life.

It was in this storm that Thomas Kelley, who lived at that time on the Brannan farm west of town, went out to his barn, about fifty rods from his house, to feed his stock, and found the storm so severe that he chose rather to remain in the barn all night than to attempt a return to the house.

During the fiercest part of the storm N. R. Persinger, who lived at that time on his homestead about nine miles north of town, started out with an armload of hay for his horses. As he went around the corner of the barn the wind caught him, threw him down, and rolled him and his burden of hay over and over. When he had righted himself again his cap had disappeared. This occasioned him no alarm, but when it was found after the storm, lodged against a stable over two miles away, the finders were badly frightened, surmising that the lost cap meant a

lost traveler frozen to death on the prairie. Such was the alarm which prevailed during the great storm.

To us of the later days, accustomed somewhat to the annual blizzards and more or less acquainted with the extremely severe storms which occur every five or six years, the fright of this great April blizzard of '73 may appear of little consequence. But to the newcomer, who had supposed March ended a western winter, its coming was unexpected and alarming, and few of those who passed through it have yet forgotten the terror of its coming or the rigor of its endurance.

CHAPTER XII.

"LONE TREE STATION."

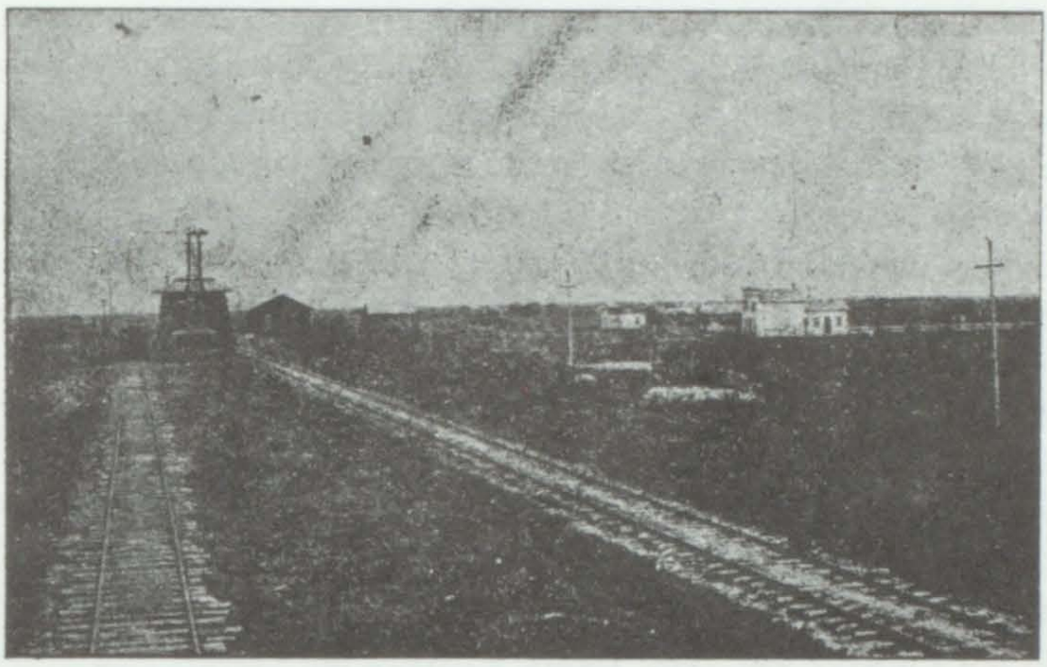
AS stated in Chapter I, the building erected by the stage company in 1858 was the first, so far as known, which was raised on the soil of the present Merrick County. It was the beginning of "Lone Tree Station," which, in the early days of western immigration, was a familiar name all the way from Maine to California. Up to 1869, however, Lone Tree Station was not the "official" town of the early settlers. As before noted, the first postoffice was at Shoemaker's Point, near Chapman. In the fall of 1864 this was abandoned for another which had been established in the spring of the same year at Brewer's Ranch, with J. G. Brewer as postmaster. Mr. Brewer's brother, Wells, in the letter to the Courier spoken of in Chapter II, says of the mail service of that day:

> Previous to that time, a daily mail route had been established from Omaha to Ft. Kearney. The contract was let to the Western Stage Company. It was conditioned therein that the mail should be carried by a daily line of four-horse coaches. But in those halycon days for contractors, these specified requirements were answered by carrying the mails every alternate day on a one-horse buckboard. Time was then divided into "stage days" and "buckboard days," a distinction with a difference, not a distinction without one, as was the case then in the matter of "week days" and "Sundays."

In the following year, 1865, Silver Glen postoffice, located two miles below the present station of Silver Creek, was established. But the advent of the railroad in the following year, and the subsequent establishment of postoffices at the various stations along the line, caused the abandonment of all the stage route offices in 1869. At this time the Brewer's Ranch Post Office was moved to Lone Tree Station, which was situated on the present site of Central City, and merged with its

post office, with Ed Parker as the new postmaster. This event marked the official recognition and real beginning of "Lone Tree Station." At the time the railroad was built, Lone Tree consisted "of little more than a turn table and a building where the railroad hands could obtain a supply of liquor."

The first building in the new town of "Lone Tree," aside from the little "depot" and section house which were put up when the railroad came through (1866), was erected by J. H. Berryman in the fall of 1868. It stood where the residence of B. E. Berryman now stands, and



LONE TREE IN 1868.
Taken from a car on the west side of town, looking southeast.

now constitutes a part of the same. As first built, it consisted of a frame upright which was used as a store. In the following year the residence portion, which is the rear part as shown in the picture, was finished and occupied by Mr. Berryman.

In this combined store and residence was held the first session of district court, in charge of Judge Crounse. When the court was ready to proceed it was found that the little frontier settlement was short one

man of the number necessary for a jury. A deputy was appointed to scour the country, and executed his "summons" upon one of the railroad employees, Constantine by name. The man refused to serve, however, when brought before the court, declaring that he 'knew nothing about the case.' The judge stated that that was the best reason in the world why he should serve. But the intended juror remained obstinate, and was finally sent to "jail" by the judge. The only jail available was a box-car on the side track, and into this the man was put, and the car-door facing toward the court-room was shut and securely fastened. The prisoner soon discovered, however, that the opposite door was not secured, and a few minutes later was seen by the judge and his mirth-stricken court running for dear life over the bleak prairie to the northwest. The court finally secured another man and proceeded with its business, but few of its members have forgotten the fleet-footed juror who 'knew nothing about the case and wouldn't serve.'

In Mr. Berryman's frontier store was also held the first revival service known to Central City life, but we reserve a narration of its experiences for a later chapter.

At about the same time that Mr. Berryman's store was built, there came into existence the remainder of the town which is visible in our picture of "Lone Tree in 1868." The buildings, in order of their appearance from right to left, are (1) store and residence of J. H. Berryman; (2) building of Frank Lisk, used as a saloon; (3) land office of Ed Parker; (4) John Foulk's little shoe shop.

The next business house was erected by Traver & May, and still stands in the same spot on which it was at first erected. Since that time, however, the buildings on the south side have given way to the brick block, and the little store over which the "Big Teapot" stood for so many years is almost hidden from sight by its more pretentious successor.

We shall not attempt to follow the individual items of growth which brought Lone Tree from a country trading point to a one-time close rivalry with Grand Island for population and the establishment of factories and other industries. It will content us to give a few more items of interest concerning the establishment and early life of "Lone

Tree," and leave the gradual growth of the town to be supplied by the reader's imagination.

The town of Lone Tree was originally intended by the Union Pacific to be situated on railroad land, west of where the depot now stands. By some mistake of the party who staked out the location of the depot, however, that building was situated on the extreme eastern edge of the railroad's section, and the town, growing up around it, covered more of the neighboring section than it did of that belonging to the railroad. The loss this mistake caused the railroad, by depriving them of the monopoly of town lot selling, is easily seen.

The welfare of early Lone Tree was largely dependent upon the industry which supplied the railroad with cord-wood for the use of its engines. Messrs. Brewer were engaged in this business, and the larger part of the settlers hereabouts were in their employ. A large supply of wood had been cut, drawn to town, and stacked up along the railroad, when in 1869 word was received that the railroad had substituted the newly-found coal of the western states for wood, and that its wood contracts would not be completed. At the time of this announcement there were one or two thousand dollars due the Merrick County contractors, and they were in turn owing nearly all the settlers various amounts for work under their contract. For almost two years no money was obtainable from the railroad, and commercial activity was almost entirely suspended in Lone Tree. Mr. Berryman closed his store and went out to work in the field for his daily bread.

But in the early part of the second year the contractors discovered that by commencing an action against the railroad they were liable to get the money due them. Acting upon this Wells Brewer went to Omaha, and returned not long afterwards with the amount due him. This was distributed among the bankrupt citizens of the county, and the frontier trade resumed its normal proportions.

Lone Tree's pioneer merchants made their most profitable transactions with the Indians. The Indians knew nothing of money but that it was to be spent. The sooner he could spend it the happier he was, especially if a goodly share of it had gone for "fire water." He would come into the store, look over the stock, and buy whatever caught his eye, until his money was gone, when he would depart satisfied. When

in need of anything after his money had been spent he would bring a buffalo hide to town and sell it to the merchants for goods to the amount of $2. The merchant would then ship the hides to Omaha and get $10 apiece for them. Such was the life of a merchant in those old days of Lone Tree.

But the little town continued to grow. In the years following the completion of the Union Pacific there was a constantly-increasing stream of immigration, and much of it was satisfied with Merrick County soil. Hundreds of letters came to the postmaster inquiring as to the prospects and advantages of Lone Tree, and by 1875, when the town outgrew its former name, and changed to "Central City," there was a population of between 1000 and 1200 where once a group of 100 persons had considered themselves quite a "village."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "MIDLAND PACIFIC."

IN the Merrick County News of August 8th, 1872, appeared the following item, concerning a project whose real scope was apprehended not even by the few who first brought it to the attention of the public:

> Dr. Converse, superintendent of the Midland Pacific R. R., has given assurance that he will soon survey a route from Lincoln to Lone Tree with a view of determining the praticability of our county as a railroad point. That a road will be built west from Lincoln there is no doubt. Just where it will be located depends entirely upon the feasibility of the route and the willingness of the people to aid. No one conversant with the lay of the country between Lincoln and Lone Tree, and still westward, has any doubt as to the advantages over other sections, and in order to secure a southern connection, we believe our people stand ready to do the fair thing by any corporation that will guarantee the sure and speedy building of a railroad through Merrick County. We trust the people of our county will weigh well the benefits to be derived from a southern connection by way of Lincoln, and when called upon for aid, subscribe to the utmost of their ability. Other localities are figuring upon the chances of securing the proposed road, and if we win the day we must be up and doing.

The article just quoted is the first record we can find of the introduction into Merrick County life of the long-drawn-out and bitterly contested "Midland Pacific" struggle. Some of the more aggressive citizens of the county believed that a competing railroad was needed, affirming that the monopoly held by the Union Pacific was enriching that road at the expense of the people. These found in the proposition of Dr. Converse, who was the superintendent of the company which was constructing the "Midland Pacific," an apparent opportunity to secure the competitive railroad they were seeking.

This proposition was received and discussed by the county board of Merrick County, and resulted in the following "election proclamation," which appeared in the Lone Tree Sentinel during the month of August, 1873:

At a session of the Board of County Commissioners of Merrick County, in the state of Nebraska, held at Lone Tree, upon the 25th day of July, 1873, it was by said board resolved that the following proposition be, and hereby is, submitted to the electors of Merrick County, towit:

Shall the County Commissioners of Merrick County aforesaid, for the purpose of aiding in the construction, extension and completion of the Midland Pacific Railway from the city of Lincoln, in the county of Lancaster in said state, to the town of Lone Tree, in Merrick County, issue the bonds of said county in the sum of one hundred and twenty-five thousands dollars ($125,000) payable to the Midland Pacific Railway Co., or bearer, to be dated the first day of January, A. D. 1875, and payable in twenty years from the date thereof, with interest thereon at the rate of ten per cent per annum from and after the date thereof....Said bonds for $125,000 to be delivered....to said Midland Pacific Railroad Company, or order, when the said railway shall have been completed from Lincoln aforesaid to Lone Tree aforesaid, and shall have regular trains running thereon for business, provided, said railway shall have been completed and have through trains running regularly thereon from Lincoln aforesaid to Lone Tree aforesaid, on or before the first day of January, 1875, and provided also, that the depot of said Railway shall be located within one-fourth mile of the court house of said county, and, provided, further, that said Railroad Co. shall cross Prairie Island with their road, and shall plank their bridge at least 18 feet in width from the north bank of said Prairie Island to the north bank of Platte River for a wagon bridge, and shall open the same free for a public highway for ten years from January 1st, 1875.....The form in which the questions in said proposition shall be taken shall be by ballot..... The question of the adoption of said proposition shall be submitted to the electors of Merrick County at a special election to be held on the 30TH DAY OF AUGUST, 1873..... ED PARKER, Co. Clerk.

We have gone somewhat into the details of the proclamation in order that it may be definitely understood for what the people were voting. For their issue of $125,000 bonds they were to secure a railroad connection with Lincoln, the road to cross Prairie Island and be so planked as to serve as a wagon bridge from Prairie Island to the Merrick County bank of the Platte.

This proposition was accepted by the voters of the county at the election of August 30th, 1873, and the people were beginning to congratulate themselves on the prospect of a rate competition, when news was received that the Union Pacific had secured a temporary injunction against the bonds and was seeking to make it permanent. The

grounds on which their plea for an injunction was made were stated as follows in the opinion handed down by Judge Dillon:*

First, That no copy of the question submitted to the voters of the county was posted up at the place of voting during the day of election in Lone Tree Precinct, the town of Lone Tree being the county seat, and that precinct giving in favor of the proposition a larger vote than the majority for the proposition throughout the county, thus controlling the result.

Second, That the proposition or question involved three distinct subjects to be passed upon, and consequently the submission was illegal. First—the construction of the railroad to Lone Tree; Second—the establishment of its depot on a particular place; Third—the construction of a wagon bridge over the Platte river.

This plea for an injunction, made in the United States Circuit Court and before Judge Dillon, resulted in a refusal of the injunction, the judge replying to the two objections thus:

First, The proofs quite satisfactorily show that the law was complied with in this respect. It is conceded that a copy of the question was posted on the front door of the court house (in one of the rooms of which the election was held), and was the usual place for posting official and legal notices; and the evidence also tends very strongly to show that another notice was posted on the door of the very room (the sheriff's office in the court house) in which the election was held.

Second, There were not three distinct propositions submitted, or three distinct projects sought to be aided. On the contrary only one proposition was submitted, viz.: To vote aid to the extent of $125,000 to the Midland Pacific Railroad Company; but this aid was to be upon condition that the depot of said company should be located within one-fourth mile of the court house; and upon the further condition that the company would so construct its bridge over the Platte River that it might be used as a wagon bridge.....

But the rejoicing of the bond advocates over this decision was cut short by the announcement that the Union Pacific would carry the case to the supreme court. The Union Pacific soon abandoned this idea, however, and left the Midland Pacific at liberty to build its line and receive Merrick County's aid. In the State Journal shortly afterward appeared the statement that "Dr. Converse now declares his intention of extending his road west to Lone Tree, Merrick County, immedi-

*Our copy of this opinion is taken from the Lone Tree Courier of July 16, 1874.

ately." There now seemed to be no reason why, by 1875, Lone Tree should not have its second railroad.

But whatever might have been the result in an ordinary year and under ordinary circumstances, the delay caused by the injunction suit and the blighted crop prospects of the famous "grasshopper year" of 1874 prevented any attempt on the part of the Midland Pacific to avail itself of the favorable decision of the county, and the victory of the bonds in 1873 left Merrick County nothing ahead but the bitterness which the contest had aroused.

The second and more exciting bond campaign came in 1875, and will be considered in a later chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

MERRICK COUNTY JOURNALISM—1872–1875.

MERRICK County's first newspaper appeared at Lone Tree on the 21st day of March, 1872, and was called "The Merrick County News." It was edited by Henry Kelsey, now the editor of the Renville Times, of Olivia, Minn. The paper was what is technically known as a six-column folio with "patent" outside. Mr. Kelsey was a comparative stranger to Lone Tree life, and the first issue of his paper was devoted almost exclusively to advertisements and locals referring thereto. Yet much that is now of interest appeared in the new paper, and we shall devote the larger portion of this chapter to an inventory of its contents, believing that therein we shall enable our readers to find much unwritten history, and a clearer impression of what Lone Tree in 1872 consisted.

In this first Merrick County paper appear the following advertisements:

John Foulks, boot and shoe maker,
Nelson Barnes, contractor and builder,
W. A. Porter & Son, wagon-makers,
Jesse Turner, attorney-at-law,
M. L. Wright, "Headquarters Saloon,"
H. N. Bryant, "Bryant's Hotel,"
Sparks & Ewing, attorneys-at-law,
Wm. McEndree, general merchandise,
J. B. Adams, land agent,
Baker & Root, druggists,
Moore & May, farm implements,
H. W. Persons, general merchandise,
Traver & May, lumber yard,
J. H. Berryman & Bro., general merchandise.

The county directory for 1872, as contained in the News, was as follows:

Commissioners—Wm. McAllister, Jason Parker, Jesse Turner,
Probate Judge—John L. Martin,
Clerk—Ed Parker; deputy—J. C. Percival,
Treasurer—James Vieregg,
Sheriff—L. B. Willoughby; deputy—N. R. Persinger,
Superintendent Public Instruction—Chas. E. Mead,
Coroner—Dr. J. J. Fisher,
Surveyor—H. N. Bryant; deputy—N. R. Persinger,
Justices of the Peace—
Silver Creek Precinct—L. K. Hills, Richard Jarman,
Clarksville Precinct—C. B. Hartwell, John McLean,
Lone Tree Precinct—L. L. Doolittle, Richard Eatough,
Chapman Precinct—John L. Martin, Hans Klingenberg.

The list of jurors drawn for the March term of court reveals a good many names familiar to the old settlers, and more or less well-known to the present generation. The list was as follows:

GRAND JURORS:

F. L. Haywood	J. C. Lemasters	Atwood Fales	Niels Hansen
James Weed	Frederick Laub	Horace Allen	Edwin Irwin
Hans Klingenberg	Wallace McGavern	Orrin T. How	Erasamus Nielson
George A. Clark	F. George	John Persinger	Noah Heater

PETIT JURORS:

Henry Daniels	Cyrus Lee	C. N. Carrier	T. M. Quick
George Schorup	Ed C. Shaw	W. Noble	G. C. Hulce
Delos Hutchins	Lewis Zellars	Daniel Snow	E. Hards
Thos. Matthews	Zachery Fales	Samuel Beaven	T. F. Parker
Elijah McKendry	Earl Edwards	Francis Coyle	T. J. Benthinger
Joseph Learn	Henry C. Wells	Hamlet Foster	D. L. Greiner

Among the few local items we find the following:

Some fifty families have arrived during the week and occupied their homesteads.

The Rev. J. Gunderman preaches alternate Sundays at his residence.

W. A. Comstock has shipped several carloads of grain westward during the week, and with good results.

Market quotations for 1872 are of sufficient interest to justify quoting, and are headed

OMAHA MARKET:

Flour, per sack, from $4.00 to $5.00,
Wheat, " bushel, " 75c to $1.10,
Corn, " " " 21c to 27c,
Butter, " pound " 20c to 22c,
Potatoes, per bushel, 30c.

The subscription price of this first paper was $2 per year, and its advertising rates $100 per column per year, and as much for the same space for six months as is now asked for one year. Of course the smallness of the field and the scant patronage necessitated these com-

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NOTE.—That the younger generation may know what names rightfully belong to the "pioneer" list, we reprint the roll of legal voters of Lone Tree Precinct in 1872:

Adams, Jos.
Armstrong, J. R.
Anderson, Anders
Bockes, Ephriam
Brown, Wm.
Burroughs, W. W.
Brewer, Jas. G.
Brewer, Wells
Bullock, Sidney
Berryman, Jas. H.
Biggs, J. T.
Biggs, Wm.
Barnes, Nelson
Bryant, H. N.
Brackett, W. A.
Bacon, B. E. H.
Brinkerhoff, D. W.
Burk, W. K.
Bener, John
Burnett, E. R.
Barnes, Chas.
Buckley, Henry
Barge, Robert
Bacon, Jesse
Bruno, Alex
Bruno, Henry A.
Brown, Chas, E.
Baird, Robert G.
Berryman, Bell E.
Crooks, H. D.
Crook, F. D.
Clark, Geo.
Carrier, C. N.
Cummings, H. D.
Comstock, Wm. C.
Comstock, D. B.
Compbell, Robt.
Clark, Duncan
Clark, D. Y.
Clark, Benj.
Carrol, James
Clary, E. B.
Clark, W. N.
Dunnivan, Jas.
Doolittle, L. L.
Duffin, Michael
Dayton, E. F.
Davis, W. H.
Eatough, Richard
Eatough, Chas.
Edwards, Earl
Eastman, Leander
Ellithorp, Eugene
Ewing, Albert
Fitch, C. N.
Fitch, J. E.
Fails, Atwood
Foulkes, Jno.
Fails, Zach
Foreman, Wm.
Fisher, J. J.
Foreman, Alex
Fouts, Silas
Farner, Wilson
Frazier, S. D.
Fitzgerald, C. R.
Good, Thomas
Gardner, G. G.
Gunderman, Jno.
Garret, J. M.
Howe, Wm.
Hilton, Eugene
Howe, Orrin P.
Hilliard, Jno.
Huff, John G.
Hopkins, Daniel
Huff, Jer.
Henshaw, Samuel
Huxford, A. J.
Hiscock, A. P.
Heaton, Henry
Hards, E.
Hollowood, T. L.
Hugett, Chas. C.
Irwin, Samuel
Irwin, Jno. H.
Jewell, Frank
Johnson, Thos. A.
Jeffers, Ira S.
Jones, G. W.
Jouls, L. L.
Kombrink, R.
Kelley, Thomas
King, Asaph O.
Keyes, John
Kirkpatrick, D. C.
Kelsey, Henry
Kirkham, R. N. B.
Kull, Geo. H.
Lisk, B. F.
Lisk, Henry
Learne, Joseph
Lemaster, J. C.
Lehmer, Jacob
Long, Benjamin
Lehmer, Ira
Lemaster, J.
Marsh, W. E.
McCarn, Henry
Moore, G. W.
May, James M.
May, Lorin
Martin, H. C.
Mills, R. S.
May, Thomas
Matthews, Thomas
Mead, Chas. E.
Miller, Henry A.
McKendry, E.
Martin, Samuel

paratively high prices, but, aside from "legal" patronage, there was little more profit in the newspaper business of those days than in the present.

We turn from the perusal of this pioneer paper with a clearer knowledge of the days in which our fathers lived and of the people who composed the early population of our county.

Less than one year after the establishment of the News, political complications (the usual cause!) produced a second aspirant for journalistic honors, in the "Lone Tree Sentinel,"* with Col. W. H. Webster and George A. Percival as editors. From a previously published letter of Mr. Percival's we gain the following information concerning the new enterprise:

Mears, R. A.
Miller, Hudson
Miller, Albert
May, Wm.
McClelland, Geo.
Martin, W. L.
McEndree, Wm.
Nay, Erasmus
Nunemaker, N.
Nay, J. N.
Nay, C. C.
Osterhout. H. C.
Parks, Alpheus
Parker, Jason
Parker, T. F.
Parker, Ed
Prouty, Ira
Patton, W. N.
Phelps, Wm. E.
Phelps, Joseph
Patterson, Wm.
Percival, James
Palmer, John
Powell, Wm. A.
Perry, G. P.
Purvis, Edward
Porter, J. A.
Persons, F. D.
Parkhurst, E. N.
Persinger, J. M.
Peters, Ezra
Page, Adolphus
Porter, W. A.
Persinger, N. R.
Reynolds, John
Root, D. T.
Rose, Daniel
Ratcliff, James
Rand, B. F.
Rieves, Halsey
Shaver, S. H.
Sweet, Amos
Sullivan, James
Sellers, W. A.
Story, Walter
Stearns, O. A.
Sparks, John W.
Smedley, J.
Scott, M. V.
Sparks, T. J.
Stevens, Orlando
Shaffer, Christ.
Schmelzer, J.
Sliter, Henry
Snyder, Carlton
Tilsley, Henry
Traver, Isaac
Thomas, David
Townley, W. D.
Taggart, F.
Tilsley, James
Tilsley, Wm.
Tunks, Albert
Thompson, John
Tillinghast, R. E.
Tullis, B. F.
Traver, Charles
Tracy, A. E.
Toppin, W. R.
Taylor, Robt.
Taylor, John F.
Vail, John W.
Watters, Robt.
Whitney, L. L.
Wilkins, W. E.
Wright, M. L.
Woodsides, J. H.
Willoughby, L. B.
Wilson, C. B.
Withrow, N.
Wilson, B. F.
Walker, W. G.
White, D. F
Weed, J. A.
Wells, Henry C.
Ward, B. F.
Whittaker, J. B.
Webster, W. H.
Wood, J. J.
Persons, Harry V.

*An interesting evidence of the trials of early newspaper life in our county is found in the following note, which appears just after the delinquent tax-list in the Sentinal of August 13, 1873:

[Our figures have given out. In the above tax list (fi) stands for the figure 5, and (f) for the figure 4.]

This made such queer-looking combinations as these: $2.fio (for $2.50), $f.fo (for $4.40), and $f.fifi (for $4.55).

The Sentinel was started as a "railroad paper," to advocate the carrying of the Midland Pacific Railroad bonds, and in opposition to the News, which, after advocating the bonds for a time, suddenly flopped to the other side.

Newspaper changes were as frequent, however, in those early days as in these latter years, and after five months' occupation of the editorial chair Messrs. Webster & Percival yielded it to Mr. L. Waters, who managed to stay in it for about a month, making way then for Mr. Ira Prouty. The latter got out one issue, and then, concluding that it had done enough for the world, let it die a peaceful death the following week, after a little over six months' existence.

In the early part of 1874 Geo. A. Percival and L. Waters bought out the Merrick County News, and on the 9th day of April, 1874, issued the first number of the Lone Tree Courier. But by August a new management, Hutchings & Bowerman (M. C. Hutchings and S. R. Bowerman), had stepped in, with Hon. Ed Parker as editor. The next change, whereby "Dick" Steele came into possession of Mr. Hutchings' interest, brings us into the history of Central City. So we will leave the subject for the present, and speak of the further changes in their proper places.

NOTE.—From the Merrick County News we extract the following evidence that the way of the politican even in the early days was not one of luxurious ease. The matter occupied about one-third of a single column and was heavily displayed:

FACTS
to be
REMEMBERED!!
Every vote cast against Mr. Ed Parker,
the regular Republican nominee for
REPRESENTATIVE
will operate as so much aid in helping
to elect an enemy of
MERRICK COUNTY.
Don't allow yourselves to be humbugged by
any of the new dodges now being practiced.
Beware of
WOLVES
in sheep's clothing.

CHAPTER XV.

RELIGIOUS HISTORY.

Going backward now a little, for the sake of connectedness, we discover that the first religious services in Merrick County are associated with the name of good old "Father Lemon," as he was lovingly called by his disciples. Tall of stature, strong of voice, kindly of countenance, and yet with a gentle dignity which told of the honesty of his own life, Father Lemon was a fit herald for the pioneer days of his western circuit. The first religious society in the county was organized by him at the home of J. G. Brewer, on Sunday, June 24, 1866. The organization was followed by a five days' "revival," of which the outcome was a "class" of the faithful which met regularly with their leader, Jacob Rice.

The first church organization effected in the county was the Methodist, in the year 1871. The first regular pastor was Rev. J. S. Donaldson. He was succeeded by Rev. J. M. Dressler, with whose pastorate we pass into the year of Central City's organization. For some time the Baptists and Methodists worshipped together, in the church of the former on the north side, but in 1876 the Methodists erected a home of their own on the south side and worshipped there for about ten years.

The Baptist society was formed in January, 1872, and the first pastor was Rev. John Gunderman, who remained until 1880. Their church was erected in 1872, and was the first religious edifice in Lone Tree.

In 1872 the Presbyterians organized under the direction of Rev. George W. Newell, who retained the pastorate until 1878. The Episcopalians effected an organization in 1874—a year before the

town's change of name—under the supervision of Rev. H. C. Shaw, of Silver Creek. Its earlier services, for lack of a church, were held in the court house.

The Congregationalists in 1872 organized under the pastorate of Rev. L. H. Jones, but though meeting regularly had no house of worship. They finally, however, merged with the Presbyterians.

The Catholics, during the days of Lone Tree, had held missionary services there, but no organization was effected until after the town's change of name.

Like the frontier life of all organizations, the church work in the earlier Merrick County days was not without its humorous side. As an illustration, true to life, we reprint by permission of Editor Wells the following account of the first revival services held in our county. The original article appeared in the Democrat of August 4, 1893:

In the fall of 1869 Rev. David Marquette, afterwards president of Nebraska Central College, called at Mr. Berryman's store and consulted him about holding a protracted meeting. Berryman's store was the only building to be had and was freely offered for the purpose. Nowadays Methodist preachers would hesitate a little while before holding a revival meeting in a saloon, but at that time Bro. Marquette was mighty glad to get even a saloon. The great question then arose as to whether the saloon attachment was to be closed during the meetings. Mr. Berryman would have been willing to close up the store during the evening meetings, as he wanted a vacation, but he did not dare to do so without consulting his customers. He called a mass meeting of the prominent citizens to discuss the great question. The meeting resolved by a unanimous vote that they would all attend the meeting and assist in conducting the services, provided the saloon remained open, but if the saloon was closed they would not attend the meeting themselves nor would the married men permit their wives to attend. It will be noticed that the women were more obedient then than now. In these days the women would go to the meeting without the consent of their husbands and they would commence the devotional exercises by smashing every bottle and emptying every jug in the establisment.

The next important question to be decided was in reference to the song service during the meetings. There were some good voices among the early settlers but not much musical culture. The boys could sing a drinking song but were not conversant with songs of praise, but they were willing to practice on psalms and hymns and faithfully promised to do the best they could. They immediately organized the first Methodist choir in Merrick County. Sid Bullock, of whom, perhaps, some of our readers may have heard, was chosen by acclamation as leader of the choir. The only church members in the neighborhood at

that time were Elnathan Phelps, father-in-law of H. C. Martin, and Mrs. Adams, mother of Joe and Charley Adams, and both were Methodists.

The night designated for the first meeting arrived, and the people arrived also. It was by no means a dress parade, for the early settlers did not go to meeting to show their clothes. The preacher took his stand at the open door connecting the store with the hotel dining room, the ladies of the congregation being assembled in the dining room and the men in the store. The services commenced, the first hymn was given out and the congregation sang with spirit and with understanding, led by the sweet and melodious voices of the extemporized choir. Right here we will give you the names of the members of the choir, for it is possible that our readers may have heard of some of them, and we wish to transmit their names to posterity anyhow. Here they are: Sid Bullock, Hank Martin, Jim Berryman, George Moore, Lo May, Snapp May, Isaac Traver, Ed Parker, Ira Prouty, Wallace Burroughs, Trim Biggs, Frank Parker and Ezra Lisk. And now the names of these illustrious vocalists will be handed down to coming ages as the first Methodist choir of Merrick County.

The preacher announced his text and commenced his sermon; the boys brought out their cards and commenced a game of old sledge, but they played the game very silently so as not to disturb the solemn services, and in those days they also played an honest game. The sermon went on, and so did the game. The minister was faithfully attending to his duty and the boys were giving as much attention to the sermon as they could spare from the game. The card players sat on kegs and boxes and used the top of a whisky barrel for a card table. When the sermon was over the boys arose and sung the closing hymn, and when the minister called the congregation to prayer, they knelt reverently with him and gave close attention to the words of devotion. After the benediction was pronounced Mr. Marquette would come into the store and compliment the boys on their improvement in singing and their general deportment, and then the choir would practice the hymns for the next evening's service. We are sorry to state that after practicing a hymn in concert the choir would take a drink of whisky also in concert and in consequence each hymn was sung with constantly increasing spirit. These singular meetings were continued for ten days and substantially the same program was gone through each evening. It was literally "Ten Nights In A Bar Room." We are sorry to state that no converts were made at these meetings, but who doubts but that the earnest words and faithful admonitions of the sincere Christian minister sank deep into the hearts of those wild young men and affected their whole subsequent lives. We do not know how this is, but we do know that all of them now living are reputable men and good citizens, dignified heads of families, and in whatever community they now live they are among the foremost of the leading men. They attend church with their families now, and don't play cards over the head of a whisky barrel any more.

Many people now living in this county will think the historian is romancing in the preceding statements but we assure them that it is all a plain, straight

forward, truthful tale, just as it was told us by a reliable man who was present at every meeting. We must not judge these men, however, by present standards. Their subsequent lives have proved them to be good men, and the times then were very different from now. They were young men removed far away from the homes of civilization, and they thought they must have some fun, even if that fun was not up to the highest grade of moral excellence and "let him that is without sin cast the first stone." In that case the stone will not be thrown.

There was one convert however made that year and that was James H. Berryman. He was convinced of the sin of the liquor traffic and was converted into a life long prohibitionist. He says that one year in the business was enough for him and that he then made up his mind that all the wealth of the Indies would not induce him to sell another drink of whisky and we all know how faithful he has been to that resolution.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE GRASSHOPPER YEARS."

MERRICK County has twice suffered heavily from the grasshopper plague—once in 1874, and again in 1875. From the Lone Tree Courier of July 23rd, 1874, we gain the following information concerning their first coming:

Among the new arrivals at this place are Mr. and Mrs. G. Hopper and family. In some respects this family is the most remarkable one we ever saw or heard of. In number, its members are like unto the sands of the sea shore, and their voracity is equal to that of the ever hungry and never satisfied Pawnee, than which there is no stronger form of comparison. Though evidently hungry, they appear to be quite fastidious in their tastes, manifesting a decided liking and preference for green corn, oats, young beets and other choice and valuble vegetables. They arrived early in the forenoon day before yesterday, but failing to register, and being very reticent about their past and intended movements, we have been unable to ascertain whence they came or whither they are going. It is our opinion, however, that they came either from Minnesota or Arizona, and that their destination is—but no matter. One thing is certain—they have "traveled;" are very free and easy in their manners, and from the cool and cheeky manner in which they appropriate our choicest eatables are evidently determined to make themselves quite at home while they remain with us. Our citizens are paying them every attention, and yesterday got up a demonstration in their honor, building bonfires and exerting themselves in other ways to show their appreciation of them. But it is possible for the most distinguished visitors to wear their welcome out, and our people would be only too glad to say good-bye to this family tomorrow. It is to be hoped they will take this hint and depart forwith.

The same paper the following week speaks in a similar serio-humorous manner of the departure of the great pest:

Mr. and Mrs. G. Hopper took their departure for the south last Saturday evening. They took passage on a regular, first-class gale of wind from the north,

and when last seen were crossing the line between Merrick and Hamilton Counties, going at the rate of about seventy miles an hour. Notwithstanding the fury of the wind which was blowing, flying dust, and the general threatening aspect of the weather, most of our citizens turned out to see the visitors off and wish them a long, never ending journey, and we are sure many felt they would like to heave after them, not only old slippers and shoes, but brick bats, flat irons, or anything that would be likely to make an impression upon them or accelerate their speed. We think we can safely say that nothing which has occurred here during the last year has been witnessed with so much real, pure delight and satisfaction as was the departure of this numerous, and in some respects interesting, family.

From the versatile pen of "Dick" Steele we are favored with the following account of his experiences in and subsequent to the second season of the great plague:

I arrived in Lone Tree one day in February, 1875, and put up at a hotel then conducted by Homer N. Bryant. The next day I went out onto the street and saw a large number of men drawing "relief" in the shape of government rations, army blue overcoats, "pants," blouses, and government socks. They told me these people had been stripped of all their crops by the ravages of grasshoppers the previous season. Some of these people are now the wealthiest and most influential men in Merrick County, while others became discouraged and drifted away, some into Iowa, Missouri, and other states, some into the penitentiary, and still others into the legislature. All this was the result of the original grasshopper raid of 1874 in Nebraska With this one I had nothing to do, and was in no wise responsible for it. I only participated in the second one, a year or two later. It is true that there has been considerable lying about grasshoppers, but I think it all comes about in this way. One tells the truth about grasshoppers, but eastern people insist that he is lying and then the relator becomes discouraged and goes to work lying in real earnest. Let me illustrate: I told people in Chicago, and others from the east—New York and New England,—that when grasshoppers rose to fly away the sound was like thunder or the beating of giant waves on a stern and rock-bound coast. I told them that they darkened the sun at noonday, and that at night one could hear them eating in a cornfield. I told them that so vast was the number they actually stopped railroad trains, not by holding the trains up and assaulting the passengers, but by forming in swarms on the track, so that the drive wheels of the engine could not secure traction on the rails even by the aid of the largest sand boxes. All this was true, and will be vouched for by old residents of Merrick County.

But they scoffed at me and laughed my truthful stories to scorn.

Then I got mad and did a little lying on my own account. I told them that I had often sat on the top rail of a barbed wire fence and killed grasshoppers by millions, simply by switching a lath back and forth. I told them that one day

ex-Sheriff Letcher and I went out hunting chickens—prairie chickens, not tame ones—and when a covey was flushed, Letcher would bring down his bird, while I could only kill about nineteen tons of grasshoppers. The reason for this was that Letcher was using a chokebore gun, while I was shooting with a open caliber gun that scattered the shot. I told them that grasshoppers were used as an article of diet for several years by Nebraskans, and that pickled hoppers were quoted on the market in Omaha. They seemed to believe these stories more readily than the truth, which fact has often led me to question the oldtime assertion that "honesty is the best policy."

Still, these grasshopper invasions of twenty-odd years ago did not intimidate men of grit, patience and endurance. Those who remained reaped their reward. The next day after witnessing the distributing of government aid to the destitute, I bought a half interest in the Lone Tree Courier and never had occasion to regret it.

Mr. N. R. Persinger, who was secretary of the relief committee which the visits of the "hoppers" necessitated, has furnished us with the following account of their second coming and going:

To us from eastern homes, who had known grasshoppers only as a kind of after-harvest crop, it was a wonderful experience to see them flying through the air, looking like snow flakes, thistle down, or cottonwood seeds, and so compact that for a whole day the sun shone hazily, as if shining through smoke. The wind was from a little west of north, but later changed so that it came directly from the south, and then the cloud descended and lighted upon the earth in unnumbered billions. They covered the ground so nearly that their red legs gave a reddish tint to the surface of the earth. As a person walked along, in their efforts to keep away from him the grasshoppers flew up and away, keeping a circle around him, those in front rising and circling around and lighting behind the moving person. If by any chance a grasshopper was injured, cannibal-like the other hoppers pounced upon him and soon ate him up. They seemed especially fond of the tender corn blades and all kinds of vines and vegetables. In the corn fields they gathered on the stalks and blades until every hill of corn looked as if loaded down with a swarm of bees, and in less than half a day a field of thrifty corn would be denuded of every blade and shoot, and only the bare stalk be left standing. They would eat the wheat, oat and barley straw off just below the head, and strip every blade from the stalk. The evening of the day following their falling down upon us witnessed cultivated fields despoiled of all promise of harvest. It seemed strange, awful, mysterious to us, but not for some time did we fully realize the awful calamity that had come upon us. The county was new; nearly all of our people were beginners in life, and had staked their all upon the raising of a crop, while many had gone into debt for their farming implements and even for their living. To be left with nothing to pay

their debts, or even to live upon until another crop could be raised, was a serious matter and it required great courage, economy and faith to live through it. I will not comment upon the disposition of the charity that was so wonderfully shown to our people, but the memory of it brings the warm blood rushing into our hearts even to this day.

We will close the account of the grasshopper years with a final quotation from Mr. Steele, as found in the July 8th, 1875, issue of the Courier whose purchase Mr. Steele "never had occasion to regret." It is in the nature of a farewell ode, and reads as follows:

"When the hoppers homeward fly,
Every eye with joy is gleaming;
And we watch them through the sky—
Watch their wings so whitely gleaming
To the northward, to the westward,
To the red man's reservation—
Our farewell—in fact, our best word—
Is a hearty imprecation."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MILL QUESTION.

IN the Lone Tree Courier of January 25, 1875, appeared the following account of a transaction by which J. G. Brewer had become a debtor to Merrick County in the matter of a mill property:

In January, 1872, Merrick County, by a vote of its people, loaned its credit to Mr. J. G. Brewer for the term of ten years, upon the condition that he should construct a water power from the Platte river and erect a grist mill on section 31, township 13, range 6, and operate the same as a public grist mill, grinding for toll, not to exceed the rate of one-sixth. To secure the county against possible loss, and as a guaranty that the conditions of the contract should be faithfully performed, the said Mr. J. G. Brewer executed a mortgage to the county on his homestead, located on the aforesaid section 31, conditioned that, at the end of ten years, he would pay to the county the amount of the principal and interest of the aforesaid bonds. The undertaking was at that time wholly an experiment. Many of the best informed men on such subjects thought a failure inevitable. All were aware that Judge Brewer ran the risk of losing all that he possessed in the world. But the want of a grist mill was so great, and so completely was the county secured against loss, that when the question was submitted to the people, the proposition carried by a large majority. The result was that the undertaking succeeded beyond the expectations of the most sanguine. More than a year sooner than the limit of time specified in the proposition the water power was constructed and a mill with one run of stone (as stipulated in the proposition) was erected and running; grinding for one-sixth toll.

Such was the history of Judge Brewer's first "mill proposition," and the forerunner of a second which caused nearly as stubborn a battle as did that of the ill-fated Midland Pacific. It is with the record of this second proposition that we propose to concern ourselves in this chapter.

Three years after the making of the first contract with Merrick County, Judge Brewer laid before the people a second proposition, viz.:

That if the county would cancel the mortgage it held against his homestead, and release him from his obligation to pay the bonds, he would extend his race to Lone Tree station and build a grist mill of not less than three run of stone, on or before the first day of September, 1876, and that he would operate the same as a public grist mill, grinding for the legal rates of toll. The sum and substance of the proposition was that the county give Mr. Brewer, as a bonus for the extension of his race to Lone Tree station and the erection of a mill there, the sum of $6,000.

This proposition was readily approved of by a large number of the citizens of Lone Tree, and disapproved of by about the same number. Some thought Mr. Brewer would be compelled by pressure of business and competition to erect the mill at Lone Tree before many years, even if the county should compel the payment of the original bonds, while some even claimed that the county should no more donate several thousand dollars to Mr. Brewer and his enterprise than to any other business man of the town. From the beginning, and even through change of editors, the Courier advocated the acceptance of Mr. Brewer's second proposition. In the same issue in which the statement given above occurred was also the following strong article in favor of the project:

The demand for another grist mill is now almost as imperative as it was for one two years ago. We have a large scope of country here, rapidly increasing in population, causing an ever increasing demand for the staple article of flour; also the production of wheat is rapidly increasing. We must have more mills. Brewer's mill cannot more than half supply the wants of our people even at the present time; what will be the condition of things in that respect in a few years to come? We cannot see that any valid or reasonable objection can be raised to the proposition, except such as are engendered by that local jealously which would envy the prosperity of any locality except our own, even though we may share in that prosperity, though possibly to a less degree. We admit the proposition that the county, like an individual, ought to drive a good bargain on all occasions and opportunities. Which then is to the best interests of the county—to have this proposed improvement with all its manifold direct and indirect sources of profit and prosperity; or to have at the end of ten years the six thousand dollars in bonds, with the accruing interest? This is looking at the question in its "business" aspect, and makes no account of the fact that the people of the county have already received the amount of those bonds in the shape of having their grinding

done at a reasonable toll instead of having to make long and tedious journeys of days and weeks, and then being compelled to exchange wheat for flour at the miller's own terms. Some may object to the movement on the ground that it is voting money into Mr. J G. Brewer's pocket. This, we think it will be admitted, is taking a very unbusiness view of the case. To be influenced by any such motives is to let our own narrow prejudices and jealousies stand in the place of our own interests and the public good.....But the undertaking will not be so much to his personal advantage as at first sight may appear. The water power will be an expensive one; it will cost far more than it ordinarily costs to construct water powers. The amount donated will barely be sufficient to cover the extra cost, and this being the case it is morally certain that without municipal aid the thing will never be done.

For some weeks the matter was agitated quite thoroughly, and, judging from articles appearing in print, with results favorable to the acceptance of the proposition. The additional use to which the mill race might be put as an irrigation-course in a dry season was made much of, and sentiment bade fair to turn quite satisfactorily in Mr. Brewer's direction, when the renewal of the Midland Pacific project gradually drove the mill proposition into the background.

In the early part of January, 1878, however, Mr. Brewer renewed his proposition. The only change in it appears to have been a raise of two "burrs" in the capacity of the mill, making it in the proposition of 1878 a "water power mill with three run of burrs." During the time just preceding the revival of the last proposition the legal status of the original bonding of the county for the mill had been investigated and it was now declared unconstitutional, as the law did not permit the bonding of the county for the aid of private enterprises. This brought a new factor into the settlement of the question, and by the Courier it was made use of especially. In the issue of that paper for February 28, 1878, the editor—at that time R. F. Steele—wrote as follows:

The call for an election on the proposition of Judge Brewer is before the people for their consideration.....We cannot but feel that in this project there is much to interest every tax payer in the county. Leaving all personal objections out of the question, the proposition means to the residents of this county another mill with five run of burrs, or nothing. It means the benefit of a splendid water power running into Warm Slough and furnishing two good mill sites below, with water privileges for other mills and manufactories, or nothing. We say now what the future will prove, and that is, that Merrick County will never realize ten cents

on the dollar from the mortgage on Judge Brewer's property. And this will be through no fault of his, but solely from the fact that this county, or any other, cannot legally loan its credit to a private enterprise. It is unconstitutional and void. No man will receive one penny back in taxes or save one penny in taxation, should the proposition be defeated. It is, as we have said before, a mill with five run of burrs—or nothing

But at the election of March 30th, 1878, the people of the county declared themselves unwilling to contribute the $6,000 and accumulated interest for another mill. The cause of this defeat was, as shown by the vote, mainly local jealousy. Lone Tree, Midland and Silver Creek Precincts gave majorities for the proposition; Chapman, Clarks, Prairie Creek, Central, Loup, Vieregg, Prairie Island and Mead gave majorities against it. The total vote was 681—308 for and 373 against. The result of the election was announced in the Courier by an inverted rooster and the following in display headings: "$12,000 gone up the spout! Merrick County concludes to donate that amount to Judge Brewer, and by a vote of 373 to 308 decides that for the illegal vote of 1872 we shall have NOTHING! A brilliant stroke of financial policy!"

The prediction of the Courier was fulfilled, and the negative vote lost Lone Tree not only the new mill, but also caused Merrick County the loss of its $6,000 bonds and accrued interest, as the bonding was finally declared illegal and Mr. Brewer freed from the payment thereof.

We have gone quite deeply into this chapter of Merrick County's history for two purposes: First, to show the intense interest which all public enterprises excited among the people at large; and, secondly, to indicate anew a truth which, we are sorry to say, has been often enough realized to have taught us its danger—the fact that local jealousies are more detrimental to a people's growth than the hostility of outside influences. The history of the "Mill Project" of 1872–78 is an interesting one, and we believe we have not unduly exaggerated its importance in devoting so much space to it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MIDLAND PACIFIC AGAIN.

THE struggle for a second railroad could not long be kept down. In 1875 another proposition was made by Dr. Converse, and the controversy opened up with far more intensity and bitterness than in the contest of 1872–3. In the Lone Tree Courier of May 20th, 1875, under the editorial management of R. F. Steele, appeared the following article, under the heading "Midland Pacific":

> At the railroad meeting held at the court house on the evening of the 12th inst., the proposition of Dr. Converse was accepted by an almost unanimous vote. We certainly regard this as a most favorable omen, and with all due respect to what opposition was made to the movement, we still think that, when the time comes that Merrick County is for the last time called upon to speak emphatically and to the point, to answer that all important question, "Railroad or no railroad?" those same voices will be heard declaring manfully for the road.....Shall we suffer $300,000 of taxable property to be lost to us? Shall we permit our lands to deteriorate yearly in value instead of increasing? Shall we allow our grain to be eaten up by exorbitant freights? Shall we pay $11 per ton for coal instead of $5? Shall we allow that crushing burden and overbearing monopoly, the U. P., to forever grind Merrick County into pulverized insignificance?....We think Merrick County will resplutely rise in its power, its energy, and its strength, and declare almost with one voice, "as honest men, as true fathers to our children, as workers for the interests of the county in which we have made our homes, for the sake of our families, our prosperity and our pockets, we are for the railroads now and forever!"

This fiery appeal was the signal for the active campaign. Dr. Converse came personally to Central City and stated his proposition, which was, as finally set forth in a special election proclamation, that the county should bond itself for $130,000, in return for which the Midland Pacific was to extend its line from York to an intersection

with the Union Pacific at Central City, and plank its bridge over the Platte in such a manner as to make it available as a wagon bridge. The election was set for the 2nd day of August, 1875. We shall not attempt to enter into the details of the contest, except as they are contained in the following letter received by us from Mr. Steele in February of the present year. To give our readers the full benefit of the letter we begin it at a period beyond which we have already described the progress of the bond fight:

In 1875 I came up from the Gulf of Mexico and purchased Mr. Hutching's interest in the Courier and commenced writing immediately about quite a number of things of which I was totally ignorant. I never knew how it was, exactly, but one day I wrote an editorial headed "Why Not?" in which the suggestion was made that perseverance generally conquers, and that it might be a good thing to again try to carry the bonds. The result of this amateur attempt to mould public opinion was a surprise to me. I made acquaintances rapidly. It seemed that the Courier office became at once headquarters for the "Bong Tong" of Merrick County. Men flocked there daily—county officers, politicians, ministers of the gospel, school teachers and business men generally. Then we would discuss the bond question and I began to learn something about the matter. Ike Traver, Billy Letcher, Jim Ratcliff, N. R. Persinger, Wes and Tim Sparks, Johnny Patterson, Col. W. H. Webster, besides a lot from Hall, Howard and adjoining counties made the Courier office headquarters. A mass meeting was called and we shook the red rag at the Union Pacific bull in great shape. Then up came Dr. Converse and T. P. Kennard from Lincoln, and we held another hilarious meeting. Another proposition was submitted and this brought forth a young man who has since achieved considerable notoriety in Nebraska—Senator John M. Thurston. He was sent up from Omaha by the U. P. to talk against the bonds, and Dr. Converse hired Mr. Sessions, of Lincoln, to speak in their favor. Thurston and I spoke in every school house in the county; that is, I spoke in one, and Thurston spoke in all the rest of them.

But the heroic efforts of the Courier editor and his allies were unequal to the task, and the Midland Pacific scheme was defeated in the election. Charges of bribery were freely made and some of them sustained, although the guilty parties were never punished. The extent of this demoralizing practice may be seen by a reference to the Courier of July 22, 1875, in which a signed communication contains the statement that one of the county commissioners was offered $4,000 by an agent of the Union Pacific if he would vote to reconsider the

action of the board by which the proposition was laid before the voters of the county. Mr. Steele himself says:

> Although, as a newspaper man, I was entitled to transportation, and did have it on all other roads, the U. P. called in my pass. Jay Gould sent an agent to me and offered me $700 for editorial control of my paper one week. I offered to sell him the paper, but my price was too high.

Such was the height of public indignation that an agent of the Union Pacific who had been buying votes in the neighborhood of Central City was frightened out of town, and fled for fear of his life to a neighboring village, where he boarded a train and made his way as quickly as possible to Omaha.

The sentiment which this defeat aroused among the bond advocates of the county is more or less accurately expressed by the following extract from the Courier of August 5th, 1875:

> A word has gone forth throughout this state of Nebraska, to the effect that the bonds in Merrick County were defeated. The impression spreads throughout this land that a majority of the residents of this county answered for themselves at the polls last Monday, and defeated the measure Outside of this county, in Omaha, in Grand Island, anywhere on the face of God's green earth, we care not what the impression is, or may be. But within the limits of Merrick County, within the reach of the circulation of this humble western newspaper, the facts—the stern, damning, dishonorable facts—shall be known and felt, until the same relentless hand which has crushed the citizens of this unfortunate locality down to the dust, has also suppressed our voice and placed beyond our reach the means whereby this people can know and feel the truth. Merrick County has not voted down the bonds to aid in the extension of the Midland Pacific through the county. Merrick County has not voted against the only means by which she can ever escape the ruinious freight tariff in the west. But her enemies, by fraud, by chicanery, by lies, by bribes, by downright dishonesty and dishonorable practices, have subjected her to a defeat which means ruin, to a result which, if not altered, will eventually place her far beyond the help of capital, enterprise or any inducements to emigration [probably intended for immigration].

That this feeling of anger against the Union Pacific was not altogether unjustified was evidenced by the exposure of the attempt at bribery, as spoken of in the fore part of the chapter, and by the withdrawal of passes from all those who had worked in favor of the bond measure.

In December of the same year still another movement was made toward securing the desired competitive railroad. The "Midland Pacific" was given a new name—that of the "Nebraska Railroad"—and a third special election held. The Union Pacific did not take so radical a part in this contest as in the previous ones, and the bonds carried by a majority of fifteen votes.

All the efforts thus far put forth, however, were to come to naught, for the bonds were never claimed by either the "Midland Pacific" or the "Nebraska Railroad," and it was not until five years later, when the Burlington & Missouri Railroad took up and put through, without great opposition, the bond proposition, that Central City at last secured its second railroad. The details of this last railroad bond fight will be reserved for a later chapter.

NOTE.—From Mr. J. B. Sagerty we have obtained a "list of registered voters for Lone Tree Precinct (3), Merrick County, Nebraska, for election of November 5th, 1872." It was compiled about two months later than the list from which the names appearing in Chapter XV were taken, and includes nearly one hundred names which do not appear in the September list. Mr. Sagerty's paper bears the certificate of the register and appears to be in every way authentic. The new names appearing thereon are as follows:

Ashley, S. F.	Eddy, G. P.	Miller, Washington	Smeltzly, Christ.
Applegate, James H.	Fouts, Elzy	McCathron, Peter	Skinner, Q. B.
Bruno, Henry C.	Farrell, John	Moore, George G.	Sherlock, Henry
Baird, Francis A.	Fales, Z. H.	Myers, Francis M.	Sagerty, J. B.
Baker, R. C.	Gordon, Henry	Miller, J. W.	Sellars, James
Berry, John S.	Hoff, F. S.	McGavern, Wallace	Sellars, Alexander
Berry, E.	Hayes, John	McConley, Daniel	Stuart, Thomas
Blood, J. M.	Hulce, G. C.	McMahon, John	Sellars, J. L.
Bowerman, Levi	Ireland, Thos. F.	Newman, L.	Scudder, Albert
Bowerman, J. C.	Jones, L. H.	Newcomer, Clark	Stein, Orlando
Burke, Henry	Jones, C.	Nelson, James C.	Templin, Jacob B.
Burk, John F.	Kerr, H. H.	O'Donell, Adam	Tucker, P. C.
Burk, Henry F.	King, Charles W.	Parkhurst, R. T.	Tucker, Homer
Baldwin, R. C.	Lafolletto, Robt. A.	Parkhurst, R. S.	Todd, George
Crites, Wm. H.	Lehmer, Isaac	Persing, C. E.	Travis, R. W.
Combs, Charles	Lehr, D. J.	Persons, H. W.	Tarbell, J. P.
Combs, John	Leininger, Samuel	Parr, W. H.	Vieregg, James
Comstock, Wm.	Lyman, C. B.	Powell, Geo. E.	Vansickle, Oliver
Demoss, Wesley	Lebert, Wm. R.	Powell, James E.	White, J. B.
Donor, David C.	Lambert, B. D.	Renshaw, Wm.	Wilder, E. H.
Dunn, Wilson	McNulty, James	Roberts, A. C.	Waite, Stephen
DeRock, John	McDermott, Owen	Reynolds, H. D.	Warner, Cornelious
DeRock, C. R.	Mears, Wesley	Rockwell, H. C.	Waters, Henry C.

CHAPTER XIX.

"LONE TREE" BECOMES "CENTRAL CITY."

FOR ten years after the fall of the old "Lone Tree," which it will be remembered fell a victim to the storm of 1865, either the memory of the fallen monarch or the natural indisposition of the people toward a change preserved for the little station which had been built up around the depot the old-time, familiar name of "Lone Tree." So far as we can find in any place of public record, no thought of a change of name seems to have entered the minds of Lone Tree's citizens until the latter part of 1874 or the beginning of 1875. Then the absence of the old tree, the growth of the little town away from the old location and memory of the early scenes, and the infusion of new blood into the old town life, led the people, or at least a portion of them, to seek a change of name.

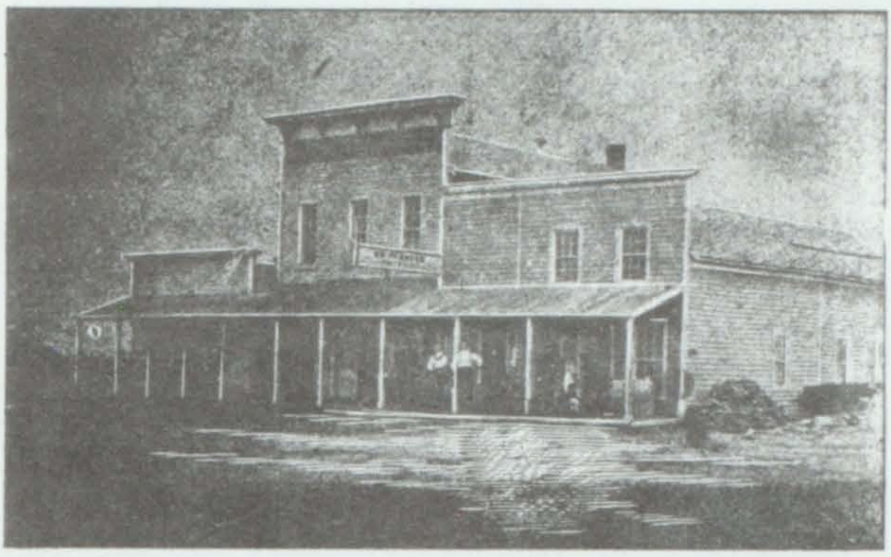
Early in 1875 some thirty-odd voters met and drew up a petition which they claimed expressed the wishes of the majority of the people of the then Lone Tree. Mr. N. R. Persinger, who was county clerk at that time, and who also drew up for the petitioners their document, tells us that, in order to dispense with discussion, when he came to the place where the name should be inserted, he announced that the one who first spoke a name which the new town should bear should have the name inserted. Morgan L. Wright, according to Mr. Persinger's memory of the occasion, responded at once with the name "Central City," and this, being acceptable to the majority, was embodied in the petition. Among the court documents of 1875 we find this petition, worded and signed as follows:

To the Honorable Samuel Maxwell, Judge of the Third Judicial District of the State of Nebraska:

Your petitioners would respectfully represent unto Your Honor: That they are a majority of the legal voters, and are residents of the town of Lone Tree, in

the County of Merrick and State of Nebraska; and that it is the desire of your said petitioners that the name of the said town of Lone Tree be changed to that of Central City; and that there is no other village, town or city in the State of Nebraska of the said name of Central City. Your petitioners assign the following reasons for desiring that such change of name should be made, to-wit:

1st. The name of Lone Tree—in the opinion of your petitioners—gives to people that are strangers to our town and its surroundings, and the inhabitants thereof, a wrong impression of the same, the said name of Lone Tree conveying the idea or impression to a stranger thereto of a place of such barrenness as to afford support to only one solitary tree in the midst of a desolate plain; whereas



This picture contains, on the right, the residence and store of R. Hards, in the center the store of H. W. Persons, and on the left Sullivan's store. The picture was taken in the 70's, and shows the buildings when they were located about where the Persons store now is.

the soil and climate of the county wherein our town is located are such as to support in the greatest luxuriance every variety of vegetation common to the Temperate Zone. It also conveys the impression that the inhabitants thereof are a wild, rough, uncouth and uncultivated people whose chief employments are the extermination of the wild buffalo and the savage Indian; whereas your petitioners aver that they are an intelligent and cultivated people, and a moral people and well fitted to associate with the best in the land.

2nd. The name of Lone Tree does not properly belong to our town, the tree from which the name was derived having been originally situated upon or near the bank of the Platte river and more than three miles from our town; and further

that said tree has not been standing for a number of years and had fallen before your petitioners hereto had located in this spot.

3rd. The name of Central City is a more appropriate name, as our town is contrally located in the agricultural region of this our glorious state; and we have every prospect (if not burthened with the ominous name of Lone Tree) of becoming a city whose turrets and spires shall attract many to us, who finding a city so centrally located in so goodly a land will take up their abiding places among us and help to increase the honor of our state and the prosperity of our city.

We, therefore, your petitioners, for the reasons herein assigned would respectfully ask that Your Honor grant the prayer of this, our petition, and cause the change of name to be made as desired. And this, as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Dated at Lone Tree this 13th day of January, A. D. 1875.

Frank Jewell	J. J. Fisher	John Foulkes	H. D. Reynolds
Sylvester E. Shipley	David Thomas	D. Martin	Wesley Demoss
J. B. Whittaker	Wm. E. Letcher	John Patterson	Michael Duffin
J S. Wylie	B. E. Berryman	N. R. Persinger	Samuel Swerer
Q. B. Skinner	J. H. Berryman	James Vieregg	R. Kombrink
A. Stone	Wm. McEndree	John Payne	James R. Ratcliff
Robert Watters	A. M. Fleming	Harrison W. Persons	M. E. Hutchings
J. Fuhrman	Richard Eatough	Morgan L. Wright	S. R. Bowerman
M. A. Goff	H. N. Bryant	S. L. Frazier	

But it happened that there were several residents of the town and county who did not fancy any change of name from the old Lone Tree. They immediately filed a remonstrance, as follows:

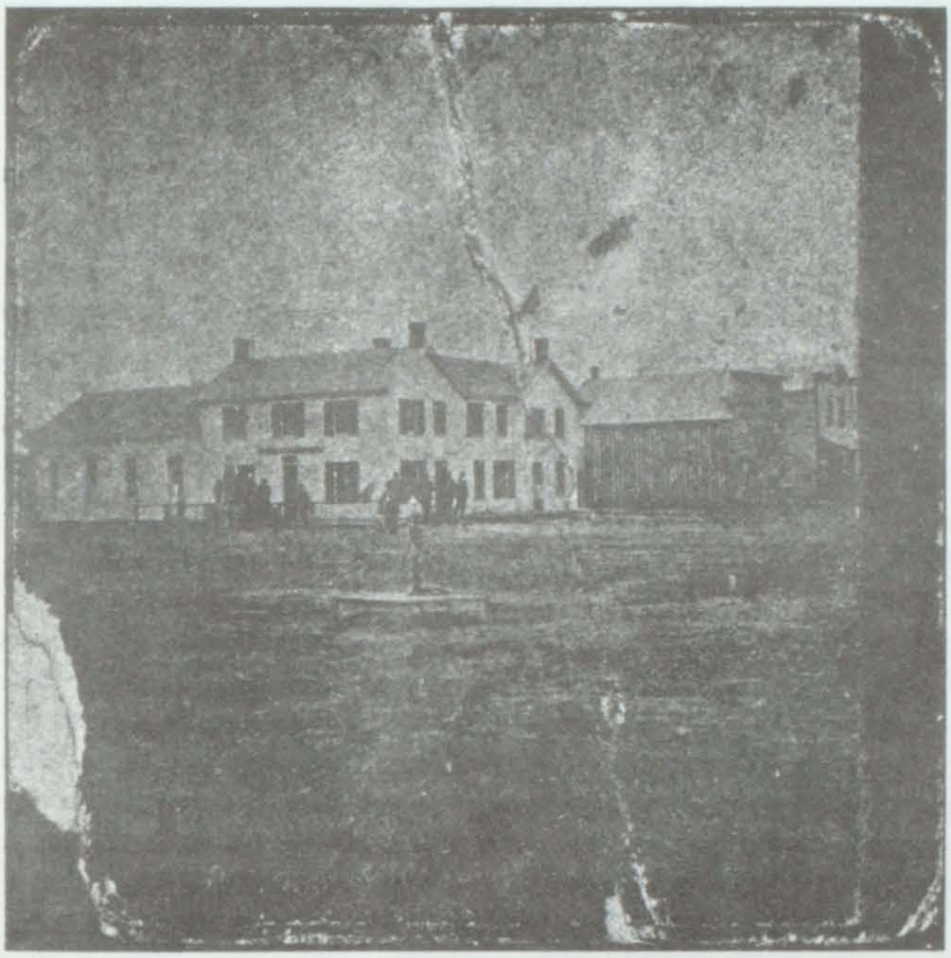
To the Honorable Samuel Maxwell, Judge of the 3rd Judicial District of the State of Nebraska:

Whereas it has come to the knowledge of the signers of this remonstrance that a petition has been filed with the clerk of the district court asking that the name of Lone Tree (by which our beautiful little town is known) be changed to that of Central City, we therefore ask leave to enter this our solemn protest against such change, and assign the following reasons:

1st. The great thoroughfare traversing this vast continent, linking this glorious Union together by an iron band, considered the place where we now stand of so much importance when they first arrived here years ago that they concluded to give it a name and a name they did give it, yes, Your Honor, a name that is dear to our pioneer fathers and mothers. Need we tell you what that name is? Look at our railroad maps scattered all over the land and there read it. Therefore our monetary interests demand that the name shall stand.

2nd. The village of Lone Tree is characteristic of a beautiful spot situated in the midst of a great agricultural district; has become so identified with its people that it is one of the landmarks which the frontiersman points out as the place

where the wild buffalo, elk, deer and antelope were seen gaily galloping in the dusky twilight, or the place where he first met his black-eyed Mary or wooed his dusky maid. True, the tree from which our village derives its name has long since fallen down; yet the place can be distinctly located by the old pioneer. That in respect to the memory of the Lone Tree the citizens of our village with their own hands procured a suitable tree and planted it in one of the most public



"BRYANT'S HOTEL."

Taken in 1870 or 71, when the hotel (now the Central City House) faced to the north. Just south of the hotel is the Bryant livery barn, and on the extreme right of picture may be seen the new store building of the Berryman brothers.

places, to-wit: near the depot. Now, Your Honor, we ask in the name of common justice, in the name of those settlers who so interested themselves in perpetuating the name of Lone Tree, shall all this work be lost and the name to us dearer than life pass away like a tale that is told?

3rd. We protest on account of our mail interest.

4th. That many of the petitioners do not live in or near to the village of Lone Tree.

5th. That we deny that any such impression as set forth in the said petition can or has been made on the foreign population or non-residents of this state, and of this we challenge proof.

7th. Therefore, Your Honor, the prayer of this remonstrance is that the name of our town remain unchanged; and if this can be granted our railroad maps and paper headings will remain unchanged, our mail matter still continue without any interruption, and by the enterprise of our people our Lone Tree, e'er a few years pass away, will not be alone. We therefore humbly submit to your order and will ever pray.

Leverett Taylor	J. B. White	Lorin May	Sidney Bullock
Zachery Fales	Samuel McCathron	E. Bockes	W. W. Burroughs
E. R. Lisk	Wells Brewer	T. A. Johnston	H. C. Waters
R. C. Baldwin	James C. Percival	Samuel Swerer	J. G. Brewer
D. J. Lehr	L. H. Jones	W. C. Comstock	C. W. Adams
S. A. Cheerer	Isaac Traver	Ed Parker	Chas. Howe
B. H. Bacon		H. Lusk	

Upon the filing of this petition the Courier took its position and advocated the change. In its issue of February 11, 1875, and under the heading, "What's in a Name?" it argued as follows in favor of the proposed change:

We most distinctly beg leave to answer, a good deal. Though many fond, pleasing associations cluster around the classic cognomen of Lone Tree, yet still we feel that stern necessity and the eternal fitness of things demand a change. No more appropriate or business like title could be suggested for a town with the least tinge of municipal ambition than Central City. May the prayer of our petitioners to the district court meet with a hearty approval, and Lone Tree fade away among the hovering shadows of the things that were.

The court considered the petition and the remonstrance, and finally concluded that—

"it appearing from the evidence that previous notice had been given as is required by law of such intended application for thirty days in the Lone Tree Courier, a newspaper printed in the county of Merrick and state of Nebraska, and of general circulation therein, said notice having been published in said newspaper for five consecutive weeks commencing with the 21st day of January A. D., 1875, and it appearing further from the testimony that said petition was signed by a majority of the legal voters of the town of Lone Tree and the court being satisfied by the proof that two-thirds of the legal voters of said town desire said change of name and that there is no other town, city or village in the state of Nebraska

named Central City, and the court being satisfied by proof that the prayer of the petitioners is reasonable and just, it is ordered adjudged and decreed by court now here that the prayer of the said petitioners be granted and that the name of the town of Lone Tree, in Merrick County, and state of Nebraska, be, and the same is hereby, changed to that of Central City, and that the costs of this case be taxed against said petitioners.

From the date on which this decision was given (February 24, 1875) the old name of Lone Tree gradually dropped out of use, and the new name of Central City began to have a more and more familiar sound. It was not until July 1st of that year, however, that the postoffice dropped the old designation and assumed the new one.*

*A curious relic of the change of name is now in the possession of David Lear, of Central City. It is the old postoffice stamp as it was thrown away the day that Lone Tree ceased to exist. The die reads, "Lone Tree, Nebr., Jun. 30, 1875."

CHAPTER XX.

THE BURLINGTON COMES.

THE final chapter of Merrick County's railroad history until the present time is found in the successful attempt on the part of the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad to avail itself of the opening afforded by the Midland Pacific agitation. From 1875 to 1879 there was little public attention paid to the railroad project, although many of the prominent men of the county had not relinquished the hope that a competitor to the Union Pacific might yet be secured. To this condition of the public mind the announcement made in July, 1879, that a new proposition was in process of submission by the Burlington, was as fire touched to dry fuel. Of the occasion The Courier of July 17th, 1879, says:

Hardly had the news reached us of the large majority with which the bonds had carried in Hamilton County when our citizens were thrown into considerable excitement upon learning that County Clerk Holden had just received from Manager Touzalin, of the B. & M. R. R., a proposition to the people of Merrick County to extend the line of their road from Aurora to Central City for the sum of $75,000 in bonds. Promptly upon receiving the letter a meeting of the residents of the county—as many as were able to be present—was called to meet at the court house Monday evening.....Several matters are to be discussed between the road and the county, with a view to presenting the question to the people in as clear a light as possible, so that there need be no mistake as to what they are to vote for. The proposition as it stands at present offers for the aforesaid sum to begin the construction of a road as early as Nov. 1, 1879, and have it completed by June 1, 1880, no bonds to be delivered until cars are running. Bonds are to bear six per cent interest, payable annually, principal due in twenty years from date (July 1, 1880), a sinking fund to be created at the end of ten years from date for the payment thereof. Mr. Touzalin further binds the company, as its agent, in case of a failure of the bonds to carry, to defray the expenses of the election, provided they should not exceed $300. Prompt action is urged, as the company has other arrangements

in view should the proposition be rejected. This is the proposition, and a fairer one was surely never offered to any county. The bonds are low, the rate of interest is low, and the terms generally are unexceptionable.

The meeting called to discuss this latest railroad project, after preparing a request that the bond be made a little lighter, petitioned the commissioners of the county to the end that the Burlington's proposition be submitted to the popular vote. Profiting by past experience, the leaders of the new movement endeavored to have the larger share of the bond laid upon Lone Tree Precinct, which would naturally derive the greatest benefit from the railroad when completed.

A meeting of the county commissioners was called for July 25th, and the petition of the mass meeting was presented. Public sentiment being much in favor of putting the matter to a popular vote, the board was not slow to reach such a decision. The record of the board meeting, as reported in the Courier of July 31st, is of sufficient interest to justify publication in full and is as follows:

According to announcement, a special meeting of the commissioners was called last Friday afternoon for the purpose of taking action upon the proposition of the B. & M. Railroad to Merrick County. Mr. Touzalin was present, as well as a large number of county residents. As soon as the meeting was opened, a request was made that Mr. Touzalin say a few words to the people in regard to the new railroad. Mr. Touzalin then briefly stated the intention of the company, explaining that he desired to make the proposition as fair as possible. For that purpose the bond had been cut down to the lowest figure—$60,000. The company had offered to pay all the expenses of the election in any event, whether the bonds were carried or not. The amount of bonds had been divided up—$40,000 county and $20,000 Lone Tree Precinct, giving an equable taxation to all. The bonds were not to be delivered until the road was completed and cars running. The privilege of paying the bonds in fifteen years from date, if desired, was also given, and altogether the proposition was presented in the fairest possible shape. Mr. Touzalin then stated that, situated as we are, with roads building all around us, cut off from the south by the Platte River, it was worth ten times the amount asked to secure the road—in which we readily concur. An opportunity then being given to ask questions, Col. Webster inquired if the company intended to put up a forfeit as a guarantee that the road would come if the bonds were voted. For himself he stated that he was perfectly satisfied of the company's good intentions and good faith in the matter, but thought that to some it would be much more satisfactory, and more promising of success, if the forfeit were filed. Mr. Touzalin

stated that he was at present powerless to file such a bond until he had conferred with the owners of the road. Quite an animated discussion then followed, in which the majority present apparently favored the filing of such a bond, while a few opposed it. A vote was finally taken as to the question of submitting the proposition, which resulted almost unanimously in the affirmative. A second vote was then taken to obtain the expression of the meeting in regard to the bond, which resulted likewise in an almost unanimous vote in favor of the forfeit.

The proposition as finally submitted to the voters of the county and of Lone Tree Township was a bond of $40,000 from the former and of $20,000 from the latter, due twenty years from July 1, 1880, or at option of county after fifteen years, the bonds bearing interest at the rate of six per cent per annum.

The fight for the bonds was carried on nearly as aggressively as during the former Midland Pacific turmoils, but owing to the lack of internal opposition no such degree of personal bitterness was engendered as in the previous ones. The Courier, now under the editorial control of A. Fitch and Bro., advocated the bonds with as much earnestness, if not with as radical vigor, as it did those of the Midland Pacific. The union of forces in favor of the proposition was altogether too much for the opposition, and the special election in September, 1879, resulted in a majority of four to one in favor of the bonds, the votes of the various precincts being as follows: Silver Creek—62 for, 19 against; Clarks—67 for, 76 against; Lone Tree—302 for, 6 against; Chapman—50 for, 47 against; Prairie Island—13 for; Mead—88 for, 1 against; Prairie Creek—83 for, 4 against; Loup—74 for; Central—35 for, 2 against; Vieregg—3 for, 89 against; Midland—75 for. Total—862 for, 244 against—a majority of 374 in favor of the bonding of the county for the new railroad.

Unlike the Midland Pacific, the Burlington availed itself of the opportunity offered, and before June 1st, 1880, Merrick County was in possession of the competive road for which it had been laboring for eight years. The coming of this branch of the B. & M. marks the last railroad development of the county up to the present time, so far as new lines are concerned. Various hopes have been raised from time to time by rumors that some new company intended to include some por-

tion of the county in its proposed route, but at the date of this writing (1898) all such have failed to materialize.

The history of the Midland Pacific struggle, culminating in the coming of the Burlington branch, is one of the most interesting, and yet one of the most unfamiliar, portions of the history of this county, having exhibited throughout its entire course an almost complete array of all those contradictory influences which are met with in the growth of the average western community. At least it is certain that the remembrance of the exciting times which accompanied the long contest for a second railroad will not soon fade from the memory of those who participated therein.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STORM OF 1878.

TWICE during the almost forty years since the first settler staked his claim on Merrick County soil have cyclones disturbed the peace of its people. The coming of the first has been described in Chapter X of this history. The second and more severe one—although not so fatal as that of 1871—came in the year 1878. Its appearance, course and results are thus described by the Courier of June 6th, 1878:

Last Saturday afternoon was an era of unusual excitement among our citizens, but more particularly to those residing in the vicinity of Warm Slough in Central Precinct. The weather during the day was unusually warm, almost suffocating in fact, and a great many prophesied a storm. The result, however, was scarcely anticipated. At 4:20 p. m. a black, threatening cloud came up from the west and spread out over the town and surrounding territory, yet showing clear sky around it. But little rain fell at Central City, although to the north large hailstones were gathered, and one man who drove into town exhibited a contusion on his head as large as a hen's egg, caused by the hail. When about two miles east of town, the lower and blacker cloud appeared to coalesce with a heavy, ominous looking thunder-head above it, and began to revolve in a peculiar manner with a great apparent velocity. From this central point of commotion there was let down to within about fifty feet of the earth a solid column of what appeared to be a white shaft of rain, but which was found to contain enough condensed fury to completely demolish whatever obstacle lay in its path. About eighty rods west of the school in district No. 37 the cyclone first struck the earth, and a huge cloud of mud and dust was thrown seventy-five feet into the air. Right in its course was the school house, and like an egg shell, it was caught up, dashed to pieces, and its fragments scattered like chaff. The centrifugal velocity may be estimated from the fact that splinters of the building and the furniture were strewn around an area of about a half mile in all directions. Although the general course of the storm at this place was southeast, as much of the school house is west of the foundation as east. The track of the storm, about twenty yards wide, is plainly marked by a blackening of the grass—a complete withering of all vegetation. From the school

house to the next unfortunate locality, Stewart's residence, the distance is about a mile. The course here was southeasterly, almost east. Stewart's house, a small frame building, was demolished, although upon the southern edge of the storm. His corn crib south of the house was uninjured. The family saved themselves by going to the bank of the Warm Slough, south, and of the line of destruction, about 120 yards away. The course here was over a grain field which looked as though a heavy roller had passed over it, accompanied by a heavy flood of water and drift-wood. Passing along slowly the terrible concentration of warring elements arrived at Warm Slough, southeast of the late residence of Mr. Stewart, and paused for a minute in the stream, taking up huge volumes of water with a terrible noise. Col. W. H. Webster and family, accompanied by several others, were fishing at this point. The Colonel's buggy, harness and buffalo robes were above them directly in the line of the advancing volume. His horses were picketed a little south of the edge, but one of them became frantic, broke loose from the lariat, and drove headlong into the heart of the cyclone. He was rolled and carried bodily about a quarter of a mile, when he was dashed to the ground and killed. The buggy was taken up and literally pulverized, the fragments being thrown over forty acres of land. The buffalo robe was torn into shreds. Singularly enough, the harness and collars lying under the buggy were uninjured; not even disturbed. The other horse, being unable to break loose from his lariat, remained on the southern edge of the tornado, and escaped unharmed. Fortunately for the family of Col. Webster, the storm center of the cyclone passed to the north of them, although the gravel stones rattled around them at a lively rate. Tom McDermott and his brother narrowly escaped being drawn into the vortex, by running directly in front of it toward the north They just saved themselves, landing on their faces at the northern edge. They were jumped up and down at a lively rate, however, and may consider themselves fortunate. From north of the residence of Thomas McDermott, the demon of fury pursued a northeasterly course to Joseph Gray's house, which it quickly demolished, together with his stable. Mrs. Gray, with the family, ran from the house into a grove and laid down, clinging to the trees. The main fury of the storm passed to the south of them Everything was destroyed in the house and stable and a valuable mare carried up into the air, but was let down alive, with several severe bruises. Passing about due east from this scene of ruin, the storm caught two valuable cows and instantly killed them. Directly before it, and about 80 rods distant, was the Platte River, along whose bank it followed down a short distance, when it broke and separated. The entire distance traversed by this storm fiend was, from the time it struck the school house until it dissolved at the river, about three miles. The course is plainly and unmistakably marked by blackened vegetation and fragments of buildings. The miraculous escape of the families of Messrs. Gray, Stewart and Col. Webster is remarkable. Terrible as was the scene it might have been much sadder.

To the reader of this history the record of these violent outbursts

of nature's forces may appear somewhat unnecessary. Yet we believe that no one of those who have spent the last quarter of a century on Merrick County soil would regard our work as complete if it contained no mention of the great storms which have constituted points from which is measured the remainder of the county's history. The old settler remembers the storm of '78 as one of those events which constitutes a chapter in his life, and it is this sentiment which gives it prominence in the individual mind and a place among the chronicled events of the county's history.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUR TOWNS.

WHEN the old stage road ran through Merrick County, its entrance into the county was marked by a little stage station by the name of Silver Glen. This station was located a little south and east of the place where the town of Silver Creek is situated, and occupies about the same relation to that town as the old stage station of Lone Tree held to the present town of Central City. Eleven miles farther west upon the stage road was Hartwell's ranch, which might be called the genesis of the present village of Clarks. Again, eleven miles west of the old Lone Tree station was Shoemaker's Point, which was finally abandoned that the village of Chapman might supply its place in that portion of the county's history.

With the coming of the Union Pacific railroad, as has already been noted, the stations along the old stage route were gradually deserted, and settlement gradually crystalized about the new towns along the railroad. Largest in size of population and first in point of permanent settlement of these new railroad-built towns was the Lone Tree, whose early history has been described in Chapter XII. The name of this town, as has been dwelt upon in detail in Chapter XIX, was in 1875 changed to

CENTRAL CITY,

and it is under this name that we will briefly outline its history from the change of name until the year 1895, omitting, however, many of the details connected with its growth, but better associated with the history of the county at large.

The location of the county seat at Central City has always influ-

enced largely its growth and prosperity, and given it an advantage that accounts for much of its superiority, in size and business influence, over the other towns of the county:

From the year 1875 until the year 1883 the development of Central City was that of any ordinary frontier town—somewhat slow and more or less irregular. But with the years following 1883 came that period of rapid growth known throughout the west as a "boom." From the Courier of April 12th, 1883, we learn that—

> From the way the boom starts in, Merrick County is destined to its full share of the large immigration that is now making its way westward.... Those whose available assets run up into the thousands and tens of thousands are beginning to get quite numerous, and advise us of a growth and society that is no longer frontier. Quite a large amount of capital—an element we are always glad to encourage—has located in this immediate vicinity within the past few months.

This "boom" period was hopefully inaugurated, and seemed to promise the making of a town which in commercial and social standing should outrival Grand Island. It was during these years that the "Union Block," on the north side of Broad street, were erected; that the Grand Opera House, Academy of Music, Newton Hotel and the college came into existence; that the steam flouring mill and a cracker factory, added to the coming of the Burlington, suddenly increased the importance and influence of the county seat. It was in 1886 that the people tired of facing the railroad and a row of coal sheds and elevators, and created "Stitzer Avenue." It was the period of rapid growth and large hopefulness, when industries and railroad enterprises seemed intent upon raising Central City to a high place in the business world. It may be said that during these years Central City reached a dimension from which it has never been able to advance—a point from which, in fact, it fell back and had not yet recovered at the date with which we cease to follow its history.

The boom period of Central City's history saw a few fortunes made and many wrecked. It saw the men who had stood behind the town's development since its infancy raised first to a high position, and then carried back to partial or complete ruin by the reaction.

So much for a general view of Central City. In detail it may be

said that from 1875 to 1895 Central City increased in population from four or five hundred to between twelve and fifteen hundred; in churches, from three to seven; in school buildings, from one to three; in newspapers, from one gradually up to *five, at which point our history ceases; from one business street to three; and from two residence streets to nearly a dozen more than equal to the original two.

CLARKS.

Following close upon Central City in both population and business importance has been the town of Clarks—a name shortened from the old-time Clarksville which it was christened in honor of the then superintendent of the Union Pacific, Mr. S. H. H. Clark. The early settlement of Clarks and vicinity dates back to April 1, 1865, when C. B. Hartwell located three miles east of the present station and opened a ranch for the accommodation of the stage travelling public. It was called the Junction Ranch.

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*Resuming the history of the Courier as dropped in Chapter XIV, we find that it was edited by H. R. Persinger and R. F. Steele, either in partnership or individually, until 1879, when it passed into the hands of A. Fitch and Bro., by whom it was edited until its discontinuation in 1894. Following the Courier, in 1880, the Merrick County Item made its appearance, with R. F. Steele and L. C. McCarn (Steele & McCarn) as editors and publishers. J. H. Dony soon succeeded Mr. Steele in editorial control, and before the end of the year sold out to Mr. G. A. Percival, who, with Mr. Steele, edited it until its disappearance in 1881. January 1st, 1882, the Central City Nonpareil made its appearance. It was Republican in politics, with Mr. H. B. Millard as editor, and Millard & Holcomb as publishers. The files of the Nonpareil for the years from 1885 to 1890 not being obtainable by the writer, no statement of the changes in editorial control is attempted, except that at the date with which our history closes the Nonpareil was owned by Messrs. Wolcott & Maxfield. In 1888 the Merrick County Republican, with Mr. W. P. Watson as editor, came into existence, and ran until 1893, when it was transformed into the Central City Democrat, with Mr. Geo. Wells as editor, he being still in control at the time our history closes. In 1891 the Independent Press, with Charles Grosvenor, arose to aid the Populist cause, and was running under the same editor in 1895. The last journalistic venture of which our history includes a record was the founding of the Central City Republican in 1893 by Judge W. R. Watson, the paper espousing the party politics indicated by its name.

The permanent town of Clarks was platted in 1866, during which year Mr. John McLean settled there. He was joined in that year by Mr. F. Coyle, and in 1868 two more were added to the permanent settlement, in the persons of Messrs. A. Kerr and Thomas Tague. The postoffice came to Clarks in 1869, with Mr. Kerr as postmaster, and in 1871 the first school was opened, being held in a sod shanty erected upon Mr. Hartwell's land. During the same year the first store was opened in Clarks, with Mr. L. B. McIntyre as proprietor.

The first religious services in Clarks were held in the winter of 1869-70 at the residence of C. B. Hartwell by Rev. David Marquette of the Methodist persuasion. The meetings were well attended and everybody contributed to the support of the minister. There were also services held at the home of John Higgins, on Section 21, by Father Ryan. In the spring of 1871 the first Sunday school was organized in Clarksville. It was called the Union Sunday school, with A. P. Daniels as superintendent. About this time Rev. John Gunderman, of the Baptist denomination, began holding meetings in the granary of Jesse Turner, and the people appreciated these efforts so that the building was filled to overflowing. This early church life has since taken permanent form in the organization of four denominations: The Catholic, Episcopal, Congregational and Methodist.

In newspaper history, the record of Clarks is by no means as extensive as that of Central City. The Messenger was the first paper of the town, being issued first on May 4th, 1878, by Mr. Jas. J. Kreider. On the 10th of April, 1879, Mr. J. C. Hartwell assumed control, Mr. Kreider having suddenly disappeared. The history of the paper thereafter we have not secured in detail. Suffice it to say that with the exception of the year from 1881 to 1882, when it was suspended, the Messenger has represented Clarks' newspaper enterprise until after 1890, when its name was changed to the Clarks Leader.

The town of Clarks has gradually risen from a frontier settlement to the dignity of a modern village. In 1866 it had a population of less than a score. During the years since then it has attained to a population of between six and seven huudred, with a proportionate growth of business and residence portions of the town.

During the early days, there was a time when Clarks lacked only

one vote of being selected as the state capital, and it was understood that Central City's representatives in the legislature controlled that vote—explaining to quite an extent the undercurrent of hostility which previous chapters have shown controls largely the action of Clarks people in matters wherein Central City is concerned.

SILVER CREEK.

Silver Creek was platted by the Union Pacific in November, 1866. With the exception of the section house, the first building erected at the new station appears to have been built by Mr. B. F. Hobart. In September, 1870, Mr. Cyrus Lee erected a hotel called the "Lee House," which was the first semi-public building of which the little village boasted. Among the earliest settlers in and around Silver Creek were the Shaw brothers, Mr. Lathrop (who kept a ranch two miles below the town), J. and Ed Howland (who located a mile and a half north) and James Brown. During the year 1870, Rev. H. C. Shaw, one of the pioneer Episcopalian ministers, organized the society which still holds its regular sessions there. A district school was organized in 1871. In 1874 the Congregational church was organized and has grown in numbers and strength since that day.

Silver Creek's newspaper history, so far as we are able to learn, is contained in the record of the life of the Silver Creek Times, originally a Republican paper, but at the present time, under the editorship of the Hon. Chas. Wooster, a representative of the Fusionists.

Silver Creek derived its name from the clearness, sparkle and color of the little stream which meanders over the prairie near the town. Its growth in the twenty-one years since it was platted has not yet brought it into serious competition with the other towns of the county, but has none the less made it a substantial little country settlement.

CHAPMAN.

When the Union Pacific, in 1866, staked out its towns eleven miles apart along its road, the future station of Chapman had least reason of all the stations along the road to claim for itself the name of "town." Shoemaker's Point was abandoned, and yet the truth is

hardly told when we say that it was abandoned that the village of Chapman might come into existence. From Central City to Grand Island was practically a townless tract, and even the need of a town between them was at that time unfelt.

But the decree of the railroad, that there should be a station here, could not long be disobeyed, and in 1871 the first business building of Chapman was erected by Messrs. L. Reed and C. A. Leake and occupied by them for a general trading store. The first real store was opened in 1873 by Mr. J. I. Walker and sold by him to Mr. W. H. Morris in 1877. The real importance of the town dates from 1878, when the Chapman bridge across the Platte was completed, opening up the trade of the northern part of Hamilton County for the benefit of the new town. During this year the town attained to almost its present size, and would probably be today a fair rival of the county seat had not the coming of the Burlington branch into Hamilton County a short time after taken away a large portion of the new territory after which it was reaching.

Aside from the educational line, Chapman has comparatively little history. Two or three diminutive newspapers have flourished for a month or two, but have not found nourishment enough to continue their existence. Religiously, Chapman has grown from no church accommodation to a representation by two denomination—Methodist and Baptist. The educational history of Chapman began with a school taught by Mrs. Aurand at her residence in 1871. In 1872 a school building was erected, and progress since then has been steady and rapid. Of the four earliest Merrick County towns—Lone Tree, Clarks, Silver Creek and Chapman—the latter two, at opposite ends of the county, have most nearly retained their old-time dimensions and commercial importance, although their existence is by no means to be denominated an useless one.

PALMER.

With the advent of the Lincoln & Black Hills branch of the Burlington route into Merrick County, there came also a new era of town-building. On the south, of course, the Platte, distant less than two miles precluded the possibility of a new station. But on the north was

a large territory which had divided its trade between St. Paul and Central City, although at some distance from both of these. To this territory the extension, in 1887, of the branch road from Central City to St. Paul offered the desired opportunity for establishing intermediate shipping points. It was in this manner that Palmer and Archer came into existence. In the Courier of August, 1887, is found a letter from Mrs. R. K. Pierce, in which is contained considerable information concerning the first-named station. We give below the principal points of interest as found in the letter:

> The Lincoln & Black Hills R. R., which is an extension of the B. & M. from Central City, is now completed to Greeley Center, Greeley County. Passenger and freight trains are running regularly to the above named point of completion. The new town refered to [in the introductory portion of the letter] has been christened Palmer, and is located about forty rods east of the junction of the St. Paul branch with the main line of the L. & B. H. R. R., on a four hundred and eighty acre tract of land, purchased by the R. R. Co of Mr. W. Templin, Robert Lambert and Mrs. Samuel Lambert. It is about sixteen miles northwest of Central City and fourteen miles northeast of St. Paul....At the junction several switches, two thousand feet in length, have been surveyed and stakes are set. Also ground is laid out for a round house, fifteen hundred feet in circumference, calculated to make forty stalls. It is to be a brick structure. Car shops are to be erected. The depot will be near the city. Town lots will be surveyed soon and streets laid out. Parties from Kansas City are here waiting to commence building as soon as possible....Palmer is as beautiful for situation as the Psalmist said was Mt. Zion....It lies on an elevated plateau, overlooking one of the finest sections of country in the world. On the one hand lies the beautiful Loup Valley, with its hundreds of acres of meadow and pasture lands besides acres of oats and corn in their season; and Gage Valley, which has always been noted for its beauty, on the other.

From the foregoing it will be seen that Palmer was not brought into existence without those exaggerated hopes which attended the rise of nearly all of our county towns. And although Palmer has never realized the ambitions of its early citizens, it has not been the least among the settlements of the county. From a score of inhabitants in 1885 it grew in a few years to a population of about 200, which was approximately its size in the closing year of its history as we record it —in 1895.

Mr. G. M. Burlingame, one of Palmer's oldest settlers, informs us

that the first building erected in Palmer was built in September, 1887, by Mr. Joe A. Hays, and occupied by Hays Bros. as a grocery store. Church and school facilities were a part of the original town, Palmer having been created in the later years when the county was so thoroughly organized in all these lines as to make immediate response easy to the demands of the new town. Palmer's first paper, the Palmer Sun, was started in October, 1887, by Mr. Chas. E. White, and continued by him until 1892, when it was transformed into the Palmer Prodigal, under editorial control of Mr. Fred G. Shaffer. who ran it for a few months, when it was permanently discontinued.

ARCHER.

In a personal letter to the author, Mr. C. D. Chapman, who has been connected actively with Archer life from its beginning, tells the following interesting story of the extension of the Burlington branch and the subsequent establishment of the town which is situated about half way between Central City and Palmer:

> In the winter of 1886 I wrote to Mr. Touzalin, of the B. & M , and suggested an extension of the road from Central City to St. Paul, setting forth in my letter the advantages of drawing to the B. & M. freight traffic for Chicago that then went to the Union Pacific. At the time I received only an acknowledgement of the receipt of the letter, but in about thirty days there came a letter from Mr. Touzalin, thanking me for my suggestion and stating that although they could do nothing on it that year, the plan would be filed for use the following spring. When the spring of 1887 came, I received word from the B. & M. that in about two weeks surveyors and the railroad gang would be along and commence work. I was corresponding for the Courier at that time, and stated in my items that the B. & M. would soon commence the extension of its line from Central City out our way [Midland precinct]. Nearly everyone thought I was joking, but in two weeks more the surveyors had come, and I worked with them a month. Through them, by advice and counsel, I got the town of Archer located where it now is and later secured for it the name of Archer. In the fall of 1887 Mr. E. Hanson moved the Adams Center Creamery and store into the new town, from its former site two miles southwest. In the spring of 1888 I put up the first building—a store 16x32, and later put up a larger store. Mr. Hanson formed a partnership with Mr. J. B. Templin in the fall of 1888, and the same still continues. Mr. H. O. Chapman taught the first school in the town.

Archer occupies the position of a shipping point midway between

Central City and Palmer, and as such has not had the opportunity for expansion that the latter two towns have. Yet from two or three buildings in 1887 it has grown to a settlement of about 125 inhabitants, supplied with the usual school, church and mail facilities.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MERRICK COUNTY.—1880-1895

WITH the year 1880, it may be safely said that Merrick County had passed beyond the "pioneer" stage of its growth. In the half-decade immediately preceeding, it had acquired four towns, spanned the Platte with wagon bridges, and settled down to the more quiet and orderly life which is common to the established community. Yet the passing away of Merrick County's pioneer days must not be construed to mean the closing of its history. It was in the years of which this chapter treats that the greatest growth of the county in population and substantiality took place, and during which the more permanent elements of its life were given their first form and influence.

Merrick County, and particularly its county seat, Central City, has always been a prominent battleground of the temperance and license forces. Previous to 1880 the fight had been more or less intense under the local option system, and in that year a commotion of considerable magnitude was created by the blowing up, by gunpowder, of a Central City saloon. So far as the records go, the responsibility for this affair was never definitely located, and at the time each element was active in accusing its opponents of the deed. One thing appears on the surface of the affair, however, and that is that the temperance element, as such, neither participated in nor had knowledge of the existence of such a plot. The saloon was badly wrecked, and the bitterness of the fight was much increased for some time, but as it became more and more evident that the deed was one of personal, rather than partisan, purpose, popular interest subsided, and the struggle was renewed along the old line. The result has been that common to all

reform work—a more or less steady swing from one extreme to the other, with perhaps a greater share of the real benefits accruing to the anti-license advocates.

The year 1880 was made memorable to Central City people in particular, and to the county in general, by the holding of the state G. A. R. reunion of that year at that place. Central City had reached the stage where it was to take a large step forward, and become the town which Grand Island afterwards became, or to accept the more humble station of a thriving country town. The coming of the reunion was regarded as a favorable omen, and aroused the hope that the state would recognize the ambition of its people, and accord the county the honor of an inland metropolis. The reunion was held north of town, on the pasture lands east of the extension of Cattaraugus avenue, and was attended by an immense number of people. The Courier and the Item made the gathering the subject of special daily editions. That the aspirations of those early days were too great it is not difficult for the citizen of today to discern, but in spite of the unrealized hopes which it emphasizes, the memory of the reunion of '80 is one which the average inhabitant of Merrick County retains with pleasure.

It will be recalled that in the early portion of our history was noted the first trouble to which the farmer of the county was subjected —the grasshopper raid. It was not until 1882 that a second disturber of the agricultural peace appeared, in the form of a hail storm of wide range. In that year there swept over a large part of the county a storm of hailstones which demolished crops and injured property, giving to the people a new experience, of whose repetition they have ever since stood more or less in dread. Two years later—in 1884—their fears were realized, and again, and to an even greater extent, was the farmer's crop sacrificed to the storm god. The destruction of 1884 was of sufficient extent to produce a decided financial stress among the farmers of Merrick County, and, reacting, among all who were in any way connected with Merrick County life.

Through all of the fifteen years which are embraced in this chapter, was going steadily on that gradual change by which the county adapted itself to its larger growth. The commissioner system was dropped and the supervisor system was substituted for it. Central City grew into a

city of the second class (1886) and acquired a mayor and council. The small-postoffice stage of growth—resulting in such as Vick, Burlingame, Loup, and other little "crossroads" postal accommodations—was passed and the mail facilities, as well as commercial transactions, confined to the towns, which had in the meanwhile been increased in number by the addition of Archer and Palmer. The annual county fair came into existence and achieved its highest popularity during these years, starting on a slow decline in their latter end. Social and political life became more compact throughout the county, and the county's people, brought nearer a common center by the gradual extension of the improved roadways reaching out from the county seat, became more alive to the common interests and less exclusively concerned with the affairs of their own neighborhoods.

The great blizzard of 1888, which swept so devastatingly over all the western country, did not spare Merrick County. The Courier of January 19th, 1888, thus reports the storm which, it says, "will be historical:"

Last Thursday afternoon, while inhabitants of this part of the country were congratulating themselves on the enjoyment of such mild weather in mid-winter, suddenly, without a moment's warning, a blast of wind from the north, accompanied by a shower of snow, swept across the earth like an avenging fury. The view of objects more than a few yards distant was obliterated in an instant, and the thermometer commenced falling with astonishing rapidity. Windows rattled, buildings shook, and the snow commenced piling itself in drifts across the thoroughfares. Those who were away from home contemplated the situation uneasily, and parents thought with great anxiety of their children at school. The blizzard raged on into the night with unceasing force, but Friday morning the wind had moderated and the air was clear. The thermometer continued falling, however, until Sunday, when it astonished the individual who walked out into the quiet atmosphere about daylight to look at it, by registering, according to various reports, all the way from 35 to 40 degrees below zero. This record, we believe, beats any that is reported by the "oldest inhabitant."

So far as we have been able to learn, the blizzard numbers no victims in Merrick County, although some harrowing experiences are reported. Mr. J. E. Miller and wife, of Mead Precinct, started home Thursday evening and lost their way. Their team, after floundering around awhile, stumbled into Prairie Creek, and Mr. and Mrs. Miller got wet. In this cheerless condition they found their way to a deserted house, sheltered their horses there as well as they could, and spent the night inside. Necessarily they suffered considerably, and Mr. Miller

had hard work to keep his wife from succumbing to the intense cold, but they managed to endure their surroundings and get home the next day. We understand, however, that Mrs. Miller's condition is somewhat serious. A gentleman in the employ of Mr. L. C. Hart was loading a wagon with hay from a stack when the storm struck him. After several vain endeavors to get his team to face it, he sheltered them on the lee side of the stack, burrowed into it himself, and, hauling in after him a couple of dogs he had with him, spent the night very comfortably. Mr. Bice, who is teaching school north of Chapman, spent the night in the building with his pupils. As they had plenty of fuel they suffered only a little inconvenience. We learn that other teachers and scholars in the county went through the same experience. Many parents in town went to the school-house after their children and brought them home.

In the year following the blizzard, considerable interest was aroused in the county by the announcement that medicinal springs had been discovered on the farm of Mr. P. C. Moore, about a mile and a half east of Central City. Visions of a profitable summer resort, and a consequent increase in the population and reputation of the locality, appeared to the citizens of the county. But either the discovery was exaggerated or else the importance of the project minimized by subsequent events, for no serious attempt was afterwards made to develop this "natural resource."

Only once has a large portion of the county been more or less seriously deluged by floods. In June, 1891, the first flood came. Said the Courier of June 24th: "The northern part of town [Central City] this morning reminds one of 'A Street Scene in Venice,' while a broad river has cut the southern part in two. An unusually heavy rain last night on top of an already saturated ground and swollen streams, has sufficed to beat the flood record in this part of the country. Locust street is navigable from the M. E. Tabernacle to the Phelps House. Nearly all sidewalks across sloughs have been washed out, and the 'draws' in this locality have been converted into lakes. The B. & M. and U. P. tracks east of town have both been washed out and trains have been delayed at this point." The remainder of the county did not escape, for wherever there was a low place there was a lake, and rivers rushing through every little 'draw.'

The opposite of the flood came in 1893, when for the first time the "drouth" made a general failure of crops throughout the county. This

was the third and greatest foe of the agricultural region. Grasshoppers and hail had always been more or less local, but drouth was general. During the years 1893, 4, and 5, the people of the county came to know the full meaning of drouth, for failure of crops was almost universal, only those in the lowlands reaping anything from their sowing. We shall not go into further detail upon the subject of the years of drouth. Those who went through them know the hard grind of increasing discouragement which they brought with them, and their history is but an undesirable tale of hardship. At times it seemed as if some permanent good might come of these years of worry, for an irrigation ditch, running east and west through the county, was discussed, and some steps taken toward the carrying out of the plan. But it was never realized, and the lesson of the drouth was in that much lost.

Thus is practically ended the history of Merrick County up to the year 1895. In our next and last chapter we shall give the history of the "college movement" which at one time promised so much for the county. This might have been included in the present chapter, but seems important enough to be entitled to an entire chapter, which shall take up in more or less detail its inception, organization and duration.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEBRASKA CENTRAL COLLEGE.

FROM the joint "boom edition" of the Courier and Nonpareil of June 9th, 1887, we take the following brief historical statement of the founding of the institution with which this chapter is concerned:

Methodism in Nebraska has ever been progressing, and especially so in the educational line. The North Nebraska Conference—lying north of the Platte River and occupying all of the territory lying east of the west line of Hall County extended to the north line of the state—wisely looking forward to the demands of the time for moral as well as intellectual training, at their second annual conference, in September, 1884, appointed a Commission of their members, consisting of J. B. Maxfield, N. H. Gale, Wm. Worley, D. Marquett, J. S. St. Clair, J. B. Leedom and J. Fowler, with extraordinary powers to locate and establish an "institution of learning" within the bounds of the conference. This commission advertised that they would receive applications from localities desiring the institution, but that no application would be considered that would not endow the institution with a gift of at least twenty thousand dollars either in land or money. Lying contiguous to and northwest of Central City, was a section of unoccupied land, owned by two parties. The land was a beautiful plateau and was at one time considered as and offered to the state legislature of Nebraska for the location of its capitol buildings, and from its natural fitness came near being selected against the strong combinations of other competitors, and was defeated only by the adoption of what was known as the "capital removal coupon" to the new constitution. Dr. O. L. Barton, of Central City—an enthusiast on the subject of higher education—having seen the advertisement of the commission above named, proposed to the citizens of Central City that they purchase this section of land and tender 320 acres of it to the Methodist church for the location of the institution proposed. The suggestion was acted upon, and a syndicate, composed of N. R. Persinger, Jas. G. Holden, James Stephen, John W. Sparks and Orin L. Barton, did buy the land, and on the 9th day of December, 1884, at Fremont, Nebraska,

the commission accepted the offer made and located the institution at Central City, Nebraska, upon Section 5, Tp. 13, N. R. 6 W., and christened it as "The North Nebraska Conference Seminary," and elected its first board of trustees.

How the proposition for location was regarded at Central City at the time is shown by the following extract from the Courier of November 27th, 1884:

A considerable number of our citizens gathered at the rooms over Berryman Bros' store Monday evening for the purpose of seeing if anything could be done toward securing the location at this point of the new M. E. College, to be established by the North Nebraska Conference. It was represented that the matter was largely to be decided by bids from various towns, $20,000 being the minimum that would be received. The advantages of such an institution in our midst did not of course need to be discussed, and the only question was the raising of the bid. After some discussion, Dr. Barton, who seemed to be mainly responsible for the movement, proceeded to elucidate a scheme by which the citizens might not only secure the college for nothing, but even come out some thousands of dollars ahead—viz: the purchase of a designated section of land near the city, the donation of 100 acres required for the college, and the sale of the remainder in 10-acre lots. The "scheme" looked very practicable, and was received with loud applause. A paper was then drawn up, guaranteeing the $20,000 in cash or its equivalent, and an additional $10,000 to be paid by one hundred citizens, contributing ten dollars per annum for ten years. A committee, consisting of N. R. Persinger, J. K. Stableton, and Dr. Barton, was appointed to visit the conference committee.

As stated in the first of the foregoing extracts, Central City's bid was accepted. The tract of land was divided into lots, separated by pleasant prairie streets, and the lots placed on sale. Aside from the pledges given above for financial aid, scholarship certificates were issued to the amount of $12,500, each share of $100 entitling its owner to a scholarship of ten years' duration. Public meetings were held at Central City and some of the neighboring cities to arouse enthusiasm in the new enterprise, and the start was well and favorably made.

The first faculty of the new institution was headed by Dr. J. B. Maxfield as president, and consisted of the following instructors: J. K. Stableton (Principal), Mathematics and Science; Mrs. M. M. Maxfield (Preceptress), English and Lower Academic Branches; Miss Mary A. Henry, Language; Miss Bertha Morrison, Music. The first session of

the college was held in the fall of 1885, in the upstairs rooms of the building at that time occupied by M. E. McDonald & Co., just west of the Newton Hotel, with an attendance of fifty-five students.

In May or June, 1885, work was begun on the new college building northwest of town, and on the 28th of July of that year the corner stone was laid and the building dedicated in the presence of a large audience and with appropriate ceremonies. In the Courier of July 30th, 1885, may be found a list of the contents of the corner stone, which list, however, we shall not take space to include in this chapter. The building was pushed toward completion rapidly, and was nearing the point of occupancy when, on the fourth of December, 1885, a heavy wind storm which passed over the country blew down the northern and western walls of the building. The damage was repaired as quickly as possible, and on January 11th, 1886, the winter term of the first year was opened in the college building.

In the latter part of the year 1886 the ambition of those connected with the college was further stirred by the decision of the Methodist church of the state to locate and erect a state university of their denomination. Of the coming of this new factor the first record we have in a local way is the following article, found in the Courier of September 23rd, 1886:

The Methodist church of this state has appointed a committee, consisting of five from each conference and mission, and three from each of the church's educational institutions, making twenty-nine in all, to locate the M. E. state university. As soon as this is done, we are informed by Bishop Fowler, the institution will be presented by a New York gentlemen with $150,000, $100,000 of which is to constitute an endowment fund, the remaining $50,000 to be expended in building fund. It is probable that one of the three places in which the academies are now located —Central City, York and Red Willow—will be selected, and, as Central City enjoys advantages of railroad connection far superior to those of the other two we think it quite likely that she will be the chosen locality. We understand that a large portion of the commission is already known to be in favor of this place. It is needless to enlarge upon the good fortune which the securing of this institution would be considered by our citizens, or to say that the decision of the committee will be awaited by them with much interest.

Central City's offer for the new university was, in addition to the building and its campus and lots, $10,000 cash and about an equal

amount in land. The principal competitors were, aside from Central City, York, Lincoln and Omaha. The struggle for the new institution was an earnest one, and especially so as the promoters of the Central City seminary had made their original investment on the strength of their belief that it would in time bring the state Methodist institution to Central City. But Lincoln possessed the strongest attractions in best location and financial aid, and the ambition of the Central City school was forced to return to its former dimension.

It may be safely said that with the establishment of the university at Lincoln, the decline of the seminary—which had since the fall of 1885, however, been running under the name of the "Nebraska Central College"—began. Whether this was, as claimed by many, the result of a deliberate "throttling" policy on the part of the university, or the mere natural results of over-ambition and incipient "hard times," we shall not attempt to decide. Nor need it be thought that the decline was rapid. The years 1886 to 1889 were, to all outward appearances, the healthiest of its life, it having reached during that time an attendance of about one hundred and fifty students.

Ill health compelled the resignation, in 1887, of Dr. Maxfield, and in his place was chosen Rev. David Marquette, who retained that position for only a few months. Rev. Marquette was succeeded temporarily —until the session of the district conference—by Rev. J. W. Shank, and in the fall of 1888 a new president, in the person of Rev. H A. Crane, assumed the responsibilities of management.

During the third week of June, 1889, the college sent out its first graduating class, consisting of Messrs. Joseph Sparks and Geo. W. Fowler.

Rev. Crane resigning the presidency in the spring of 1889, Rev. F. W. Ware was chosen in his place, and an almost entirely new faculty succeeded the previous one. Under this management the college ran through one more year, the name of the institution in the meanwhile reverting to the original "North Nebraska Conference Seminary." In the spring of 1890 the second and last commencement took place, the graduates being Miss Jessie Benton and Messrs. Henry O. Chapman and E. Russel Leedom.

The financial burden, however, was proving too heavy for the

shoulders of those upon whom it was falling, and the college failed to open in the fall of 1890, the commencement of 1890 closing what may be termed the first chapter of the college history.

The second chapter of the history begins with the attempt at reorganization in the early fall of 1891. From the Courier of August 6th, 1891, we glean the following account of the attempt first made:

> The meeting at the Tabernacle Tuesday evening in behalf of the college was quite well attended. Chairman Heywood, of the board of trustees, Presiding Elder Moore, Revs. Marquette, Worley and Rodebaugh, Hons. N. R. Persinger and J. W. Sparks and Mr. Jas. Stephen discussed the situation, and all seemed to regard it as more encouraging than it had been for a long time—in fact, that the "early morning of a better day" had been reached. The college has succeeded in funding its debt at a low rate of interest—six per cent—through the medium of bonds secured by about all of its resources, said resources to be disposed of as far as necessary for the payment of said bonds through the agency of C. F. Bently, of Grand Island, who acts as trustee for both the college and the bondholders.

A commission was appointed to attend to the opening of the college in the fall of 1891, and it succeeded in making arrangements with Professor J. A. Smith, at that time principal of the Indianola public schools, whereby he took charge of it upon his own financial responsibility, thus rendering the school, so far as the church was concerned, self-supporting. A public reception was tendered Professor and Mrs. Smith upon their coming, and school was formally opened again in the fall.

Public confidence in the institution, however, had been more or less destroyed, and the attendance upon the reopening was very small, the year's average not amounting to fifty students. Professor Smith and his faculty completed the year's work for 1891, and conducted a summer school during July and the early part of August, with the intention of continuing the regular school work in the fall of 1892 if circumstances seemed to justify it. But the promise of success grew less as the weeks went by, and the second and last chapter of college history with which our work deals was ended by the entire cessation of work in the latter part of the summer of 1892.

THE END.

"IN MEMORIAM."

The following series of articles was published in The Nonpareil, in connection with the foregoing history, and is deemed entirely worthy a place in this volume. The author's name is, by his request, not given, and we must content ourselves with the simple statement that the writer was in the early days, but is not now (1898), a resident of the county. The abrupt ending of the articles is due to the fact that business cares prevented as extended a series as was at first anticipated, and compelled a publication of the series without any attempt at revision.

"IN MEMORIAM."

BY AN OLD SETTLER.

I find my recollections of old settlers to be very fragmentary and I will have to jot them down in a running sort of way, only touching upon the different characters as they rise in my mind above their fellows—like a wagon attached to a runaway team, only "hitting the high places." The reader must not expect these memories to be entirely free from an occasional dip into the vulgar, because I am writing of characters more uncouth, yet none the less clean, than the citizens of Merrick County today, and, to be frank, I am writing more to revive memories of the past in the minds of those of the "good old time" who still live, than for comers of a later day, who may find little to amuse them in my recollection of old settlers who have passed away.

I. JASON PARKER.

As my mind reaches back into the long ago, and once familiar faces cluster round, it easily dwells upon a well remembered form—shaggy brows overhanging deep-set, kindly blue eyes—a face that time vainly tried to rob of its charm; its honest ruggedness an index to the soul within. Dear old Uncle Jason! Thoughts of you are always pleasant, though your cheery voice is hushed. Yet the remembrance of your unselfishness is still with the ones whose lives were made more cheerful, whose future was made more hopeful, because of you.

Uncle Jason was not a member of any religious organization, his soul being of too generous a mould to be confined within the narrow limit of any creed. Were he the gate keeper of Paradise, none would be turned away. This might spoil its selectness, but would render it a happier place for Uncle Jason, whose great heart would embrace all. His was a wonderfully cheerful disposition. No trouble seemed to affect his steady flow of good humor. He used to remark that all the comandments were good, but the eleventh "Fret not thy gizzard" was his favorite and he certainly observed the injunction.

In the old overland stage days Uncle Jason's ranch was a favorite resort and had his heart been built for this day and age he would have made a fortune. The opportunities he had for extortion from travelers, new settlers and Indians, were only equaled by the times he didn't do it. A hungry or otherwise needy person never appealed to him in vain.

His money was only worth the good it would do. Too often for the well being of his exchequer was his known kindness of heart taken advantage of by the designing and the impecunious, and his name, while occupying the humbler place on a promissory note, very often became "The chief stone of the corner," when the note fell due. As a business man, he was more of a success for his patrons than himself. His mind was more bent on accomodating people than making profit, and he was usually left "holding the sack." He never could understand why one man would beat another out of anything—HE couldn't do it and finally, after having no end of opportunities to amass wealth, went to his grave a poor man in property, but rich in the love of his children and the respect of all.

After all, is it not better to bequeath to one's children only the memory of a noble, unselfish life than to have made what the world calls success, leaving its accumulation as a disturbing element that so often proves more of a curse than a blessing?

Uncle Jason was a man of decided opinions and had the courage to speak his convictions. Yet his life was so straight forward, his honesty so apparent, that he made no enemies. He was one of our county commissioners at a time when his vote was worth money, but there was not enough in civilization to buy it, and I think a sturdy old fist would have been jammed into the face of any one proposing a bribe. His memory is an oasis in today's desert of political rascality, and to its cooling shade the mind turns for needed assurance that human nature is not all bad. So I reluctantly leave him, with the thought that if all men were like we knew him to be, heaven would indeed be with us.

II. JOHN L. MARTIN.

How easy it is to remember another character of those days—for who that once knew John L. Martin could ever forget him? Intense in his likes and dislikes, loving his friends and hating his enemies seemed the elixir that for so many years gave zest to this man's life. Well I remember the bitter animosity that existed between him and Isaac Beery on the west, and Samuel McCathron on the west. He used to say he had 'the devil on one side of him and hell on the other,' while they both contended that His Satanic Majesty had located between them. The trio were more or less religious—sometimes more, but oftener less. Isaac's religion seemed to permit of swearing upon any occasion —other than upon the witness stand, at which time he would invariably refuse to take the ordinary oath, and be "qualfied" (whatever that is) instead. The religious ideas of the other two, however, seemed to run in nearly the same channel, and were the only influence, apart from anger, that ever did get them near together. They both warmed up at the same time one winter, under the eloquent preaching of a peculiar character named Wesley, and it was a nine days' wonder that John L. got into McCathron's wagon and that McCathron went out of his way to take him home. This did more to imbue that community with respect for the power of the gospel than any other thing that ever happened

and had the minister's eloquence been confined to the sacred desk, their new found friendship might have endured. But unfortunately it became noised about that the idolized preacher was somewhat given to human frailities. To this John L. assented while McCathron dissented, and again "there was razzors a flying in the air."

The subject of this sketch was not quarrelsome. He only had his convictions, and it was noticeable that with the solitary exception of the religious episode his convictions were always "ferninst" those of McCathron and Berry and were the occasion of Uncle Sammy's cane, and Uncle Isaac's crutch sometimes toying with his anatomy. No, he was not quarrelsome, but when inspired by the presence of his enemies he could and did use his tongue to such a wonderful advantage that their only salvation was to run or disable him. In politics he was a staunch but rather unique Republican, and many times have I heard his eloquent tongue fire crowds with enthusiasm for the party of his choice, and hurl fierce, blood-curdling invective at its enemies. He was one who always made himself felt and was just as much at home pleading the cause of some defenceless prisoner before a jury, preaching from an improvised pulpit, or on the political stump, as he was between the handles of his plow, or working at his anvil, and had his opportunities permitted, would have enjoyed a wide notoriety. Kindness was more a part of his nature than its opposite. He would leave his own work any time to shoe a neighbor's horse or sharpen his plow lay, and take his pay in the satisfaction of having done a kindness. We always knew that spring had come because it was invariably heralded by his appearence with gifts of horse radish to almost every family in the village, always presented to "the wife," who, according to his jocular expression, was hopelessly in love with him, and, while the expression was somewhat strong, yet his kindness won a place in the regard of both wife and husband, and when at last his turbulent spirit passed into a wider sphere, many were the sighs of regret that went up from the hearts of those who knew him best. And so, Uncle John, I leave you with your maker, believing that his all-discerning eye will readily see, and his justice reward, the virtues you tried so hard to hide from your fellow men.

III. SAMUEL McCATHRON.

It is natural, after thinking of John L., that Samuel McCathron should claim a little thought, for it is hard to think of one and not the other. The passing of years has worn away from my mind any unpleasant recollections that may have surrounded this unique character, and leaves him silhouetted against the background of memory as a Simon-pure philanthropist, whose philanthropy was enlisted in the good of the then struggling young lawyers of the county, whose prosperity would not have been so marked were it not that the title of "McCathron vs. Martin, vs. Beery, vs. everybody," always showed up in the court's docket at the opening of every term. His generous care for them reached beyond his own expectation of life, proven by the fact that his sons, John and Pete, were imbued with the

same spirit. This disinterested (?) kindness so won the feelings of John Patterson that he was wont to characterize the father and sons as "The Immaculate Three—Sammy, Johny, and Petey."

After all it was not to be wondered at that "Old Sammy," as he was familiarly dubbed, was drawn into so many law suits. Settling as he did at a very early day he had the choice of very much unoccupied territory and naturally took in all he could. After a while the country settled up, and covetous eyes were turned to the valuable timber and other lands in the possession of the McCathron family. The often incomplete records were searched for flaws in their title, and if an actual or supposed hole was found surveyors were set at work and law suits begun "ad libitum ad infinitum," (whatever that means) and I may add "Epluribus Blunderbuss," for all this turmoil did not end without bloodshed. Peter seemed to think it was necessary to kill a man on the Island, and I believe the killing was justified by the court, so of course was all right. Animosities engendered by these suits were the cause of many others, and the property accumulated by the old gentleman proved a source of continual anxiety and grief to a really good-hearted man.

He cared but little for the good or ill opinion of his neighbors, seeming rather to prefer their ill will. He kept his heart so screened from view that many thought it had been left out of his composition, but I learned to the contrary very accidentally and much to his chagrin, in this way:

A sort of half witted, ragged and dirty speciman of humanity called "Crazy Mart" showed up in the country and made himself so much of a nuisance generally that he was spurned from the doors of many, who generally would divide their food with most any one. Having entirely alienated himself from the kindness of all through slovenliness, profanity and lewdness, he finally betook himself to one of the little islands in the Platte and eked out a precarious existence by fishing, trapping and raising a few vegetables, the best of which he would exchange in Grand Island for actual necessities. I struck the little, desolate island while deer hunting one cold winter's day and was surprised to see one of old Sammy's big gray horses tied before the tramp's squalid hut. I wondered what devilment the old gent was up to now, for I was as uncharitable as the rest of his neighbors toward him. Upon entering, I faced him as he was hurriedly taking his departure and the look of shame upon his face confirmed my suspicions that he was up to some uncanny work. Hardly recognizing me he hastily left the hovel, mounted his horse and was soon crunching his way over the icy bed of the river. Lying upon a filthy cot was poor "Crazy Mart," twisted out of shape and almost dead with inflammatory rheumatism. From him I learned that which caused a complete revulsion in my feelings toward old Sammy. For three weeks he had visited that poor, forsaked boy almost every day, and being unable to move him because of the auguish the least movement caused him, had kept him in food, brought liniments, and rubbed on the distorted limbs for hours at a time. The poor boy's lip trembled and eyes grew big with tears as he recounted to me the

many, many acts of humanity and disinterested kindness showered upon him, whom all others had spurned, by hard-hearted old Sammy. Then I knew that the look of shame I had detected on the old man's face was because he had accidentaly showed me his heart. He had an assistant after that day and when the distorted limbs were straightened, the bodily rigor returned, and our services no longer necessary, the injunction to "Keep my mouth shut about it all" was once more pressed upon me, and is now only removed because the hard-hearted (?) old man is gone. For years after that I enjoyed his querulous, exacting friendship and when his ill humor would bring indignant blood to my cheek, the thought of "crazy Mart" would drive it back to a heart that always keeps a warm place for "old Sammy." And so to him, as to the others, "my pen says adieu, but my heart knows no farewell."

IV. ISAAC BEERY.

And now what shall I say of Isaac Beery? My recollections would not be complete without including him, for no man of the early days was better known by sight, and yet he lived so much in himself that few, if indeed any, outside of his own immediate family, ever "sat down to the table of his soul in confidence complete."

I remember well his hearty hospitality at home, and his many gifts of vegetables from his garden—and who ever saw such a garden anywhere else? I could relate several incidents of early days in which he figured which used to create hearty laughs. Such, for instance, as when, to prove that he had a mighty mean neighbor, he hauled a dead dog to town, which he fondly thought would create a feeling against the neighbor who had poisoned it. Meeting Sid Bullock he tragically called attention to the defunct canine, demanding in tones of sorrow and indignation, "what he thought of that?" Sid, as was his habit under a certain condition, threw his right leg out of joint, cocked his eye, and replied, "Well, Uncle Isaac, as for *you*, you may linger along for a few days yet, but *that* dog's deader than —— !"

The old gentleman, though a cripple, often proved abundantly able to fight his own battles, and they were of no infrequent occurrence. His crutch was the terror of his enemies and was usually wielded righteously. He had but few friends, seeming to care but little for social enjoyments away from his own fireside. That he was a good father is attested by the children he left, and had he had but few virtues (which I do not admit) yet would those of his children, retroacting, shield his memory from harsh criticism. I only wish I had known him better, for I am sure a closer intimacy would have discovered many noble traits of character hidden to mere acquaintances. If the sweet, kind-faced woman who shared his lot were the subject of this writing, how easily words of kindness would flow from my pen!

V. EPH BOCKES.

Hearty, cheery, whole-souled Eph—how constantly his face flits through my mind, associated with so many incidents of the days of long ago. How he did

enjoy a practical joke, and yet how careful (?) he was to make them harmless. I remember when Charley Adams (he was only a boy then) was night operator at Lone Tree station, Eph was continually putting him up to some mischief, which never failed to end ludicrously. He had an apt pupil in Charley and between them they managed to keep everybody around them in hot water. I wonder if John Foulks ever knew who stuffed the gunny bags in his chimney and smoked him out of his shoe shop? I wonder if John Sullivan ever found out who was the prime mover in a hanging bee that came so near costing him his life? Well, John, nobody ever intended to hurt you. The keg of beer you were wheeling around for us while we moved Joe Adams' house was not *all* intended for you, and the only show anyone else had to get a whack at it was to summarily dispose of you in some way, and "hanging" seemed about the only sure method. If we left you suspended a little too long it was not that we loved you less, but that we loved the keg more. Tom Johnson ought to have happened in sooner and cut you down; but Tom was as busy as the rest of us moving Joe's house, and with the rest of us forgot you. Eph actually looked serious while you were "coming to," and this ought to compensate you for the slight inconvenience of having been hung, for it was mighty seldom that anything made him look serious in those day, and we didn't think *any*thing could.

The Indians made themselves a nuisance during the winter nights by crowding into the depot, to the exclusion of the rest of us. We felt this keenly for that was our place of congregating—the place where we would smoke our pipes and tell stories until the "wee small hours." So Eph hit upon a plan to clean them out, and as a "beginner" one night when the waiting room was full of Indians and the air fuller of the noxious stench from their sweating, steaming, unwashed feet, blankets and bodies, Eph started for the house while Charley piled dry fuel into the big, old-fashioned wood stove with a big, oblong hollow drum resting horizontally on its top. By the time Eph returned the stove, room and all were at a white heat, and the Indians were stirring uneasily in their sleep, emitting grunts that would discount a hog pen. But the climax came when about half a pound of cayenne pepper was deftly thrown into the red-hot drum by Eph, and the diabolical conspirators had rushed out, locking the door after them. Well, if ever there was an aboriginal uproar it was right then. In a moment the lock of the door was smashed off with a hatchet and twelve or fifteen choking, strangling wards of the government fought to get through the door at the same time. Talk about the "stoicism of the red man under torture!" — they weren't stoics a little bit that night. For an hour after they rushed out pell mell we could hear nose-bursting sneezes from twelve or fifteen points of the compass, and Eph—well, he just rolled over the platform and roared, while Charley looked sad. It was a pretty cold night when a Pawnee ventured into the depot after that. Joe Adams was considerably "put out" the next morning when he saw the wrecked door and broken windows, but Eph got me to explain to him

that Charley was not to blame—no, not in the least!—and so he was forgiven and the U. P. stood the loss.

Then again when George Moore, who was sheriff, called upon a lot of us to help arrest Jack Considine and a little Tom Thumb Irishman who were trying to give each other softening of the brain with beer bottles, how Eph laughed when Moore cried out, "Bind them! Bind them!" after getting the belligerents secured. They were put in a box car in lieu of a jail, to be held until morning when Uncle Dick Eatough, J. P., would pass upon their case. They were no sooner put in and the lock snapped on them than Eph whispered in my ear "slip over to the depot and tell Charley to come to the back freight door." I did so, and no one yet knows how those men got out of that car. But since no one but Charley had a key to it, I have always associated their escape with that errand of mine. And Eph, although he denied it and protested that he was law abiding, and that Charley wouldn't do such a thing, yet the amused look which came into his face always made me have my suspicions. It always seemed a strange coincidence to me that he and Charley were on the train when Alex Riley escaped from Sheriff Moore, when entoute for the Columbus jail. They, with many more of us, wanted Alex to get away, but nobody seems to know how he managed to do it handcuffed and shackeled, but he did, and is gone yet. Eph always looked "amused" when the matter was discussed and of course Charley "wouldn't do such a thing." How well I remember how proud he was of little George and Anna. He would lead them into Berryman's store, stand them on the counter and the way they would sing "gospel hymns" was enough to make any man proud. We were all one family in the good old reckless days and little George and Anna had a place in all our hearts.

Don't think from what I have said that my subject's life was entirely given up to jokes and frolic, for while I could fill this entire page with like incidents, yet there was another and a nobler side to his character. His love for his children is an index to his warm heartedness for all. His ear was ever open to the cry of distress and no hand more generous than his to alleviate suffering. How he nursed the Pawnee with a frozen foot and supplied him with food; the miles he would travel to reach the bedside of a sick acquaintance, there to render the irksome service born of a sympathetic heart; how his eye would blaze at a recital of wrong and melt at that of suffering.

While he in common with all of us had his faults, yet there is not a citizen of Merrick County today whose eye ever rested on the spreading glory of our old "Lone Tree" who does not cherish in his heart the memory of our dear old friend Eph.

The veil of the mystical beyond seems lifted, and away over in the shining realms of light familiar forms appear, and a pleased fancy recognizes Eph and Uncle Jason, Old Samuel, John L., and Isaac, and with them many more who have stood in the shade of the old tree. Their glorified faces are types of peace and love; no more the unhappy bickerings of earth cast their shadows

o'er their lives. "They know each other better since the mists have cleared away" and their happy faces reflect the eternal brotherhood of man. Is there a soul so deformed, a heart so contracted between the narrow walls of creed and dogma, that it denies to these subjects of my imperfect sketches the heaven in which I leave them?

VI. OLD LONE TREE.

There is something sort o' lonesome about this history of Merrick County. It gives me the "blues" to have such old associations stirred up. If there wasn't a little streak of sunshine glimmering through it at times the "blue" devil would reign supreme with his somber wings shadowing the past.

If old Lone Tree had given the world an ante-mortem statement, how much of sunshine and how much of shadow it would have contained! It would have told us of savage scalp dancers; of victims tortured to death. It would recount the amorous wooing of the dusky swain, and in later days of some not so dusy. And how softly and mournfully its leaves would rustle as it depicted the laying away of loved forms from the sight of men forever; were those forms dusky or white, yet were they followed by tears wrung from bleeding hearts. It would have told us of love and of lust, of noble deeds and of hellish crimes; for its bright leaves have fluttered in the pure atmosphere of the prairie above, while under its spreading arms the air was polluted by the presence of Jack Slade. It has been honored by sheltering the noble form of John C. Fremont. In my mind's eye I see the tent of Brigham Young nestling beneath its shelter after a hard day's march as he led his persecuted followers into the wilderness, where they could serve God according to the dictates of their own consciences. And they did serve the "meek and lowly one" in a manner that could be profitably imitated by the so-called Christians who were their persecutors and murderers. Their history, divested of the rancorous lies that cling about it, would shine out much more white and free from crime than our own, and while we deplore their falling into the polygamy so much practiced in old Bible times, we should also deplore crimes of a like nature that, unlike theirs, are sneakingly hid from the view of man by those who were the first to cast a stone. How often the skirt that is haughtily kept from contact with that of a fallen sister is worn by one as frail! This has been proved true so often that we have learned to look with a shade of suspicion upon those who are too ready to condemn others. Well now, I wonder if this is digressing.

Please come with me out of the long ago into times nearer our own and listen to the stories of the old tree. It is telling you now of smiling on dear old Mother Martin as she hurriedly passed under it on her many visits of mercy to the bedsides of the sick. It tells how often our quaint old Grandma Hilton rested in its cooling shade after ushering into the world so many of the little ones who now fill places left vacant by death. It has laughed as John L. Martin stopped to free his mind on some imaginary foe, and at Uncle Isaac as he would menacingly shake his crutch in the direction of John L.'s ranch. Old Sammy would

quote scripture under it by the hour, and Uncle Jason would quietly sit on its protruding roots and take a big chew of tobacco, while his honest old face shone with good will to all.

It was under the muse-awakening rustle of its leaves that young Beery composed the famous impassioned poem to the idolized but unresponsive Delia Hurley, ending with these reproachful, tear-stained lines:

> If you are not fair to me,
> What care I how fair you be!

Who blamed him for being captivated by the fair, roguish Delia! By Joe! she had us all at her feet, and she could have packed her pretty, bright dresses in any of our trunks, begging our gunny bags' pardon.

One day I copied some of the hieroglyphics carved on its bark by thoughtless but friendly hands, little thinking that they were wounding their old friend to death. The name "Sid" was plain, and a living "comedy" came into my mind. On the other side of the tree—that is, in the deepest shadow "on moonlit nights"—were cut several series of initials. It seemed that in the long ago someone had cut the initials "J. V. & —. (blur)" and I think that if the carving had discovered the handwriting of the carver, Jim Vieregg would have been detected; and it would not take a great stretch of the imagination to see a Miss Martin at his side, smiling up at him as he cut their initials in the old tree in commemoration, perhaps, of a freshly spoken betrothal. Prompted by the above, no doubt, another series appeared, and "J. K. & VI" were plainly visible. So, John, you and "Vi" also did some sparking under the old Lone Tree, did you? But you didn't dream it would tell! Well, she was mighty pretty in her girlhood days; and better still, she hasn't gotten over it, and never will as long as her honest, jolly soul sparkles through her brown eyes. And I am glad that she has had a tender arm around her and a manly man at her side all these years since you disfigured the old landmark. Lower down and fresher showed the letters "T. J. & E." and I'll bet a bright new penney that Tom Johnson and Ella Doolittle were not far away when this engraving was done. I hope life is as sweet to them now as it was in those their wooing days, for Tom was brave and handsome and Ella—lord, but wasn't she sweet!